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"CARROTS:"

JUST A LITTLE BOY

" Is it then a great mistake
That Boys were ever made at all ? "

There she sat, as still as a mouse, holding her precious burden.
(*See page* 9.)

Frontispiece.

"CARROTS:"

JUST A LITTLE BOY.

Mary Louisa (BY Stewart)
MRS. MOLESWORTH,
(ENNIS GRAHAM)
AUTHOR OF "TELL ME A STORY," "CUCKOO CLOCK," "GRANDMOTHER DEAR," ETC.

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TO

SIX LITTLE COUSINS,

MORIER, BEVIL,

NOËL, LIONEL,

EDWARD,

AND BABY BRIAN.

EDINBURGH, 1870.

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"CARROTS:"

JUST A LITTLE BOY.

CHAPTER I.

FLOSS'S BABY.

"Where did you come from, Baby dear?
Out of the everywhere into here?
* * * * * *
"But how did you come to us, you dear?
God thought about you, and so I am here!"

G. Macdonald.

His real name was Fabian. But he was never called anything but Carrots. There were six of them. Jack, Cecil, Louise, Maurice, commonly called Mott, Floss, dear, dear Floss, whom he loved best of all, a long way the best of all, and lastly Carrots.

Why Carrots should have come to have his history written I really cannot say. I must leave

you, who understand such things a good deal better than I, you, children, for whom the history is written, to find out. I can give you a few reasons why Carrots' history should *not* have been written, but that is about all I can do. There was nothing very remarkable about him; there was nothing very remarkable about the place where he lived, or the things that he did, and on the whole he was very much like other little boys. There are my *no* reasons for you. But still he was Carrots, and after all, perhaps, that was *the* reason! I shouldn't wonder.

He was the baby of the family; he had every right to be considered the baby, for he was not only the youngest, but very much the youngest; for Floss, who came next to him, was nearly four years older than Carrots. Yet he was never treated as the baby. I doubt if even at the very outset of his little life, when he was just a wee pink ball of a creature, rolled up in flannel, and with his funny

curls of red hair standing crisp up all over his head, I doubt, if even then, he was ever called "baby." I feel almost sure it was always "Carrots." He was too independent and sensible to be counted a baby, and he was never fond of being petted—and then, too, "Carrots" came so naturally!

I have said that Carrots loved his sister Floss better than anybody or anything else in the world. I think one reason of this was that she was the very first person he could remember in his life, and a happy thing for him that it was so, for all about her that there was to remember was nice and good and kind. She was four years older than he, four years old, that is to say, when he first came into the world and looked about him with grave inquiry as to what sort of a place this could be that he had got to. And the first object that his baby-wise eyes settled upon with content, as if in it there might be a possible answer to the riddle, was Floss!

These children's father and mother were not very

rich, and having six boys and girls you can quite easily imagine they had plenty to do with their money. Jack was a great boy at school when Carrots first joined the family party, and Cecil and Louise had a governess. Mott learnt with the governess too, but was always talking of the time when he should go to school with Jack, for he was a very boy-ey boy, very much inclined to look down upon girls in general, and his sisters in particular, and his little sister Floss in *particularest*. So, till Carrots appeared on the scene, Floss had had rather a lonely time of it, for, "of course," Cecil and Louise, who had pockets in all their frocks, and could play the 'March of the Men of Harlech' as a duet on the piano, were *far* too big to be "friends to Floss," as she called it. They were friendly and kind in an elder sisterly way, but that was quite a different sort of thing from being "friends to her," though it never occurred to Floss to grumble or to think, as so many little people think now-a-days, how much

better things would have been arranged if *she* had had the arranging of them.

There was only one thing Floss wished for very, very much, and that was to have a brother or sister, she did not much care which, younger than herself. She had the most motherly heart in the world, though she was such a quiet little girl that very few people knew anything about what she was thinking, and the big ones laughed at her for being so outrageously fond of dolls. She had dolls of every kind and size, only alike in one thing, that none of them were very pretty, or what you would consider grand dolls. But to Floss they were lovely, only, they were *only* dolls!

Can you fancy, can you in the least fancy, Floss's delight—a sort of delight that made her feel as if she couldn't speak, when one winter's morning she was awakened by nurse to be told that a real live baby had come in the night—a little brother, and "such a funny little fellow," added nurse, "his

head just covered with curly red hair. Where did he get that from, I wonder? Not one of my children has hair like that, though yours, Miss Flossie, has a touch of it, perhaps."

Floss looked at her own tangle of fluffy hair with new reverence. "Hair somesing like my hairs," she whispered. "Oh nursie, dear nursie, may Floss see him?"

"Get up and let me dress you quickly, and you shall see him—no fear but that you'll see more of the poor little fellow than you care about," said nurse, though the last words were hardly meant for Floss.

The truth was that though of course every one meant to be kind to this new little baby, to take proper care of him, and all that sort of thing, no one was particularly glad he had come. His father and mother felt that five boys and girls were already a good number to bring up well and educate and start in life, not being very rich you

see, and even nurse, who had the very kindest heart in the world, and had taken care of them all, beginning with Jack, ever since they were born, even nurse felt, I think, that they *could* have done without this red-haired little stranger. For nurse was no longer as young as she had been, and as the children's mother could not, she knew, very well afford to keep an under-nurse to help her, it was rather trying to look forward to beginning again with all the "worrit" of a new baby—bad nights and many tiring climbs up the long stairs to the nursery, etc., etc., though nurse was so really good that she did not grumble the least bit, and just quietly made up her mind to make the best of it.

But still Floss was the only person to give the baby a really hearty welcome. And by some strange sort of baby instinct he seemed to know it almost from the first. He screamed at Jack, and no wonder, for Jack, by way of salutation, pinched his poor little nose, and said that the next time

they had boiled mutton for dinner, cook need not provide anything but turnips, as there was a fine crop of carrots all ready, which piece of wit was greatly applauded by Maurice and the girls. He wailed when Cecil and Louise begged to be allowed to hold him in their arms, so that they both tumbled him back on to nurse's lap in a hurry, and called him "a cross, ugly little thing.' Only when little Floss sat down on the floor, spreading out her knees with great solemnity, and smoothing her pinafore to make a nice place for baby, and nurse laid him carefully down in the embrace of her tiny arms, "baby" seemed quite content. He gave a sort of wriggle, like a dog when he has been pretending to burrow a hole for himself in the rug, just before he settles down and shuts his eyes, and in half a second was fast asleep.

"Baby loves Floss," said Floss gravely, and as long as nurse would let her, till her arms really

ached, there she sat on the floor, as still as a mouse, holding her precious burden.

It was wonderful how trusty she was. And "as handy," said nurse, "indeed far more handy than many a girl of five times her age." "I have been thinking," she said, one day to Floss's mother, "I have been thinking, ma'am, that even if you had been going to keep an under-nurse to help with baby, there would have been nothing for her to do. For the help I get from Miss Flossie is really astonishing, and Master Baby is that fond of her already, you'd hardly believe it."

And Floss's mother kissed her, and told her she was a good little soul, and Floss felt, oh, so proud! Then a second thought struck her, "Baby dood too, mamma," she said, staring up into her mother's face with her bright searching grey-green eyes.

"Yes," said her mother with a little sigh, "poor baby is good too, dear," and then she had to hurry off to a great overhauling of Jack's shirts, which

were, if possible, to be made to last him another half-year at school.

So it came to pass that a great deal of Floss's life was spent in the nursery with Carrots. He was better than twenty dolls, for after a while he actually learnt, first to stand alone, and then to walk, and after a longer while he learnt to talk, and to understand all that Floss said to him, and by-and-by to play games with her in his baby way. And how patient Floss was with him! It was no wonder he loved her.

This chapter has seemed almost more about Floss than Carrots you will say, perhaps, but I couldn't tell you anything of Carrots' history without telling you a great deal about Floss too, so I daresay you won't mind. I daresay too you will not care to hear much more about Carrots when he was a baby, for, after all, babies are all very like each other, and a baby that wasn't like others would not *be* a baby! To Floss I fancy he seemed a remark-

able baby, but that may have been because he was her very own, and the only baby she had ever known. He was certainly very good, in so far as he gave nurse exceedingly little trouble, but why children should give trouble when they are perfectly well, and have everything they can possibly want, I have never been able to decide. On the whole, I think it must have something to do with the people who take care of them, as well as with themselves.

Now we will say good-bye to Carrots, as a baby.

CHAPTER II.

SIX YEARS OLD.

"As for me, I love the sea,
The dear old sea!
Don't you?"

Song.

I THINK I said there was nothing very remarkable about the place where Carrots lived, but considering it over, I am not quite sure that you would agree with me. It was near the sea for one thing, and *that* is always remarkable, is it not? *How* remarkable, how wonderful and changeful the sea is, I doubt if any one can tell who has not really lived by it, not merely visited it for a few weeks in the fine summer time, when it looks so bright and sunny and inviting, but lived by it through autumn and winter too, through days when it looks so dull and leaden, that one can hardly believe it will ever

be smiling and playful again, through fierce, rough days, when it lashes itself with fury, and the wind wails as if it were trying to tell the reason.

Carrots' nursery window looked straight out upon the sea, and many and many an hour Floss and he spent at this window, watching their strange fickle neighbour at his gambols. I do not know that they thought the sea at all wonderful. I think they were too much accustomed to it for that, but they certainly found it very *interesting*. Floss had names for the different kinds of waves; some she called "ribs of beef," when they showed up sideways in layers as it were, of white and brown, and some she called "ponies." That was the kind that came prancing in, with a sort of dance, the white foam curling and rearing, and tossing itself, just exactly like a frisky pony's mane. Those were the prettiest waves of all, I think.

It was not at all a dangerous coast, where the Cove House, that was Carrots' home, stood. It was

not what is called "picturesque." It was a long flat stretch of sandy shore, going on and on for miles just the same. There were very few trees and no mountains, not even hills.

In summer, a few, just a very few visitors used to come to Sandyshore for bathing; they were always visitors with children, for every one said it was such a nice safe place for little people.

But, safe as it was, it wasn't till Carrots was growing quite a big boy, nearly six, I should think, that Floss and he got leave to go out and play on the shore by themselves, the thing they had been longing for ever since they could remember.

This was how they did get leave at last. Nurse was very, very busy, one day; really quite extra busy, for she was arranging and helping to pack Jack's things to go to a new school. Jack was so big now, about sixteen, that he was going to a kind of college, or grown-up school, the last he would go to, before entering the army. And there was

quite a fuss in the house. Jack thought himself almost as grand as if he was an officer already, and Mott was overpowered with envy. Everybody was fussing about Jack, and no one had much time to think of the two little ones.

They stood at the nursery window, poor little souls, when Floss came up from her lessons, gazing out wistfully. It was a nice spring day, not exactly sunny, but looking as if the sun were only hiding himself to teaze you, and might come out any minute.

"If we *might* go down to the shore," said Floss, half to herself, half to Carrots, and half to nurse. I shouldn't have said it so, for there can't be three halves of anything, but no doubt you will understand.

"Go down to the shore, my dear?" repeated nurse, "I wish you could, I'm sure, but it will be afternoon, at least, before I have a minute to spare to take you. And there's no one else to-day, for cook and Esther are both as busy as busy.

Perhaps Miss Cecil and Miss Louise will take you when they have done their lessons."

"We don't care to go with them, much," said Floss, "they don't understand our plays. We like best to go with you, nursie, and you to sit down with your sewing near—that's the nicest way. Oh, nurse," she exclaimed, with sudden eagerness, "wouldn't you let us go alone? You can peep out of the window and see us every few minutes, and we'll be so good."

Nurse looked out of the window doubtfully.

"Couldn't you play in the garden at the back, instead?" she said. "Your papa and mamma won't be home till late, and I am always in a terror of any harm happening while they are away."

"We won't let any harm happen," said Floss, "and we are *so* tired of the garden, nurse. There is nothing to play at there. The little waves are so pretty this morning."

There was certainly very little to play at in the

green, at the back of the house, which was called the garden. Being so near the sea, the soil was so poor, that hardly any flowers would grow, and even the grass was coarse and lumpy. Then there were no trees, and what is a garden without trees?

Nurse looked out of the window again.

"Well," she said, "if you will really be very good, I think I might trust you. Now, Master Carrots, you will promise to do exactly what Miss Floss tells you?"

"Yes, I promise," said Carrots, who had been listening with great anxiety, though he had not hitherto spoken—he was not a great talker—"I promise, nurse. I will do exactly what Floss tells me, and Floss will do exactly what I tell her, won't you, Floss? So we shall both be *kite* good, that way, won't we?"

"Very well," said nurse gravely, though she felt very much inclined to laugh, "then run and get your things as fast as you can."

And, oh, how happy the two were when they found themselves out on the shore all alone! They were so happy, they did not know what to do; so, first of all, they ran races to run away a little of the happiness. And when they had run themselves quite hot, they sat down on a little heap of stones to consider what they should do next. They had no spades with them, for they did not care very much about digging; children who live always by the sea never care so much about digging as the little visitors who come down in the summer, and whose very first idea at the sight of the sea is "spades and buckets."

"What shall we play at, Carrots?" said Floss, "I wish it was warm enough to paddle."

Carrots looked at the little soft rippling waves, contemplatively.

"When I'm a man," he said, "I shall paddle *always*. I shall paddle in winter too. When I'm a man I won't have nc nurse."

"Carrots," said Floss, reproachfully, "that isn't good of you. Think how kind nurse is."

"Well, then," replied Carrots, slowly, "I *will* have her, but she must let me paddle always, when I'm a man."

"When you are a man, Carrots," said Floss, solemnly still, "I hope you will have something better to do than paddling. Perhaps you'll be a soldier, like Jack."

"Killing people isn't better than paddling," retorted Carrots. "I'd rather be a sailor, like papa."

"Sailors have to kill people, too, sometimes," said Floss.

"*Have* they?" said Carrots. Then he sat silent for a few minutes, finding this new idea rather overwhelming. "Naughty people, do you mean, Floss?" he inquired at last.

"Yes," said Floss, unhesitatingly, "naughty people, of course."

"But I don't like killing," said Carrots, "not killing naughty people, I don't like. I won't be a soldier, and I won't be a sailor, and I won't be a butcher, 'cos butchers kill lambs. Perhaps I'll be a fisherman."

"But fishermen kill fish," said Floss.

"Do they?" said Carrots, looking up in her face pathetically with his gentle brown eyes. "I'm so sorry. I don't understand about killing, Floss. I don't like it."

"I don't either," said Floss; "but perhaps it has to be. If there was no killing we'd have nothing to eat."

"Eggs," said Carrots; "eggs and potatoes, and —and—cake?"

"But even that would be a *sort* of killing," persisted Floss, though feeling by no means sure that she was not getting beyond her depth, "if we didn't eat eggs they would grow into chickens, and so eating stops them; and potatoes have roots, and

when they're pulled up they don't grow; and cake has eggs in, and—oh I don't know, let's talk of something else."

"What?" said Carrots, "Fairies?"

"If you like, or supposing we talk about when auntie comes and brings 'Sybil.'"

"Yes," said Carrots, "I like that best."

"Well, then," began Floss, "supposing it is late in the evening when they come. *You* would be in bed, Carrots, dear, but I would have begged to sit up a little longer and——"

"No, Floss, that isn't nice. I won't talk about Sybil, if you make it like that," interrupted Carrots, his voice sounding as if he were going to cry. "Sybil isn't not any bigger than me. I wouldn't be in bed, Floss."

"Very well, dear. Never mind darling. I won't make it like that. It was very stupid of me. No, Sybil and auntie will come just about our tea-time, and we shall be peeping along the road to see if the

carriage from the station is coming, and when we hear it we'll run in, and perhaps mamma will say we may stay in the drawing-room to see them. You will have one of your new sailor suits on, Carrots, and I shall have my white piqué and blue sash, and nurse will have made the nursery tea-table look so nice—with a clean table-cloth, you know, and quite thin bread and butter, and jam, and, perhaps, eggs."

"I won't eat one," interrupted Carrots; "I won't never eat eggs. I'll keep all mine that I get to eat, in a box, till they've growed into chickens."

"But they're boiled when you get them," said Floss; "they wouldn't grow into chickens when they're boiled."

Carrots sighed. "Well, never mind," he said, "go on, Floss."

"Well, then," started Floss again, "you see the nursery tea would look so nice that Sybil would be *sure* to ask her mamma to let her have tea with us,

even though it was the first evening. Perhaps, you know, she would be rather *shy*, just at first, till she got to know us. So we would be very, very kind to her, and after tea we would show her all our things —the dolls, only—Carrots, I'm afraid the dolls are getting rather old."

"Are they," said Carrots, sympathisingly. "When I'm a man I'll buy you such a *lot* of new dolls, Floss, and Sybil, too, if she likes dolls —does she, Floss?"

"I don't know. I should think so," said Floss. "When papa and mamma went to see auntie, they said Sybil was like a doll herself. I suppose she has beautiful blue eyes and long gold curls. That was a year ago; she must be bigger now. Carrots."

"What?"

"We must get up and run about a little now. It's too cold to sit still so long, and if we get cold, nurse won't let us come out alone again."

Up jumped Carrots on to his sturdy little legs. "I'll run, Floss," he said.

"Floss," he began, when they stopped to take breath again, "once I saw a little boy with a hoop. It went so nice on the sands. I wish I had a hoop, Floss."

"I wish you had, dear," said Floss. "I'd buy you one, if I had any money. But I haven't, and we couldn't ask mamma, because I know," and Floss shook her head mysteriously, "I know poor mamma *hasn't any money to spare.* I must think of a plan to get some."

Carrots kept silence for about three quarters of a minute. "Have you thinkened, Floss?" he asked, eagerly.

"Thought," gravely said Floss, "not thinkened, what about?"

"About a plan," replied Carrots. He called it "a pan," but Floss understood him.

"Oh, dear, no," said Floss, "not yet. Plans take

a great lot of thinking. They're real things, you see, Carrots, not like fancies about fairies and Sybil coming."

"But when Sybil does come, that'll be real then," said Carrots.

"Of course," agreed Floss, "but fancying about it before, isn't real."

It took Carrots a little while to get this into his head. Then he began again.

"When will you have thinkened enough, Floss? By tea-time?"

"I don't know. No, I think you had better wait till to-morrow morning, and then perhaps the plan will be ready."

"Very well," said Carrots, adding, with a little sigh, "to-morrow morning is a long time, Floss."

"Not very," said Floss, consolingly. "Now Carrots, let's have one more race, and then we must go in."

CHAPTER III.

PLANS.

"'Have you invented a plan for it?' Alice inquired,
'Not yet,' said the knight."

Through the Looking-glass.

THE next morning Carrots woke very early, and the first thing he thought of was the plan. Floss and he slept in the night nursery, in two little beds, and nurse slept in a small room that had a door opening into the nursery. She used to sleep there herself, but now that Carrots was so big, Floss and he were quite safe by themselves, and poor old nurse enjoyed having her own little room.

Floss was still asleep, so Carrots only climbed out of his own cot into hers, and crouched himself down at the foot, watching for her to wake. Floss

looked very nice asleep; her "fuzzy" hair was tumbling over the pillow, and her cheeks looked pinker than when she was awake.

"I wonder what being asleep is," thought the little boy as he looked at her. "I always go away, such a long way, when I am asleep. I wonder if Floss does."

She couldn't have been very far away just then, for somehow, though Carrots sat so still, she seemed to know he was there. She turned round and half opened her eyes, then shut them as if she were trying to go to sleep again, then opened them once more, quite wide this time, and caught sight of the funny little figure beside her.

"Carrots," she said, in a sleepy voice, "Carrots, dear, what are you doing there? You'll catch cold."

"No, I won't. May I come in 'aside you, Floss? I was only watching for you to wake; I didn't wake you, did I?" said Carrots, as Floss made room for him, and he poked his cold little toes down into a

nice warm place, "I did so want to know if it was ready, for it's to-morrow morning now."

"If what's ready?" said Floss, for she was rather sleepy still.

"The plan for getting money."

"Oh!" said Floss. "Yes," she went on after thinking for a minute, "yes, it's nearly ready; at least I'm almost sure it is. But it's not quite ready for telling *you*, yet, Carrots."

Carrots looked terribly disappointed.

"I think," went on Floss, "I think it will be ready for telling you after breakfast. And if you like, you may listen to something I am going to ask nurse at breakfast, and, perhaps, that will help you to guess what the plan is."

At breakfast time Carrots was all ears. All ears and no tongue, so that nurse began to wonder if he was ill.

"I shouldn't like you to be ill the very day after Master Jack has gone," she said anxiously (Jack

had gone up to town by the night train with his father), "one trouble at a time is quite enough for your poor mamma."

"Is Jack's going to the big school a trouble?" asked Floss, opening her eyes very wide, "I thought they were all very glad."

"My dear," said nurse solemnly, "one may be glad of a thing and sorry too. And changes mostly are good and bad together."

Floss did not say any more, but she seemed to be thinking about what nurse had said. Carrots was thinking too.

"When I'm a man," he said at last, "I won't go to a big school if Floss doesn't want me to."

Nurse smiled. "There's time enough to see about that," she said, "get on with your breakfast, Master Carrots; you'll never grow a big boy if you don't eat plenty."

"Nurse," said Floss, suddenly, "what's the dearest thing we eat? what costs most?"

"Meat, now-a-days, Miss Flossie," said nurse.

"Could we do without it?" asked Floss. Nurse shook her head.

"What could we do without?" continued the child. "We couldn't do without bread or milk, I suppose. What could we do without that costs money?"

"Most things do that," said nurse, who began to have a glimmering of what Floss was driving at, "but the money's well spent in good food to make you strong and well."

"Then isn't there anything we could do without —without it hurting us, I mean?" said Floss, in a tone of disappointment.

"Oh yes," said nurse, "I daresay there is. Once a little boy and girl I knew went without sugar in their tea for a month, and their grandmother gave them sixpence each instead."

"Sixpence!" exclaimed Floss, her eyes gleaming.

"Sixpence each," corrected nurse.

"Two sixpences, that would be a shilling. Carrots, do you hear?"

Carrots had been listening with might and main, but was rather puzzled.

"Would two sixpennies pay for two hoops?" he whispered to Floss, pulling her pinafore till she bent her head down to listen.

"Of course they would. At least I'm almost sure. I'll ask nurse. Nurse dear," she went on in a louder voice, "do you think we might do that way—Carrots and I—about sugar, I mean?"

"I don't see that it would do you any harm," said nurse. "You must ask your mamma."

But Floss hesitated.

"I shouldn't much like to ask mamma," she said, and Carrots, who was listening so intently that he had forgotten all about his bread and milk, noticed that Floss's face grew red. "I shouldn't much like to ask mamma, because, nursie, dear, it is only that we want to get money for something for ourselves,

and if we told mamma, it would be like asking her to *give* us the money. It wouldn't be any harm for us not to eat any sugar in our tea for a month, and you could keep the sugar in a packet all together, nurse, and *then* you might tell mamma that we had saved it, and she would give us a shilling for it. It would be quite worth a shilling, wouldn't it nurse?"

"Oh, yes," said nurse, "I am sure your mamma would say it was." Then she considered a little. She was one of those truly trustworthy nurses whose notions are strong on the point of everything being told to "mamma." But she perfectly understood Floss's hesitation, and though she might not have been able to put her feeling into words, she felt that it might do the child harm to thwart her delicate instinct.

"Well, nurse?" said Floss, at last.

"Well, Miss Flossie, I don't think for once I shall be doing wrong in letting you have a secret.

When will you begin? This is Thursday; on Saturday your mamma will give me the week's sugar—suppose you begin on Sunday? But does Master Carrots quite understand?"

"Oh, yes," said Floss, confidently, "he understands, don't you dear?"

"Oh, yes," said Carrots, "we won't eat not any sugar, Floss and me, for a great long time, and nurse will tie it up in a parcel with a string round, and mamma will buy it and give us a great lot of pennies, and then, and then"—he began to jump about with delight—"Floss and me will go to the toy-shop and buy our hoops, won't we Floss? Oh I wish it was time to go now, don't you Floss?"

"Yes, dear, a month's a good while to wait," said Floss sympathisingly. "May we go out on the shore again by ourselves this afternoon, nurse?"

"If it doesn't rain," said nurse; and Floss, who had half an hour to wait before it was time for her

to join her sisters in the school-room, went to the window to have a look at the weather. She had not stood there for more than a minute when Carrots climbed up on to a chair beside her.

"It's going to rain, Floss," he said, "there are the little curly clouds in the sky that Matthew says come when it rains."

Floss looked up at the sky and down at the sea.

"The sea looks cross to-day," she said.

There were no pretty ripples this morning; the water looked dull and leaden.

"Floss," said Carrots, with a sigh, "I do get *so* tired when you are at lessons all the morning and I have *nucken* to do. Can't you think of a plan for me to have something to do?" Carrots' head was running on "plans."

Floss considered.

"Would you like to tidy my drawer for me?" she said. "This isn't the regular day for tidying it, but it is in a mess, because I turned all the things

upside down when I was looking for our race horses' reins yesterday. Will you put it *quite* tidy, Carrots?"

"Oh, yes, *quite*, dear Floss," said Carrots, "I'll put all the dolls neat, and all the pieces, and all the sewing things. Oh, dear Floss, what nice plans you make."

So when Floss had gone to her lessons, and nurse was busy with her morning duties, in and out of the room, so as not to lose sight of Carrots, but still too busy to amuse him, he, with great delight, set to work at the drawer. It certainly was much in need of "tidying," and after trying several ways, Carrots found that the best plan was to take everything out, and then put the different things back again in order. It took him a good while, and his face got rather red with stooping down to the floor to pick up all the things he had deposited there, for the drawer itself was too heavy for him to lift out bodily, if, indeed, such an idea had occurred to him. It was

the middle drawer of the cupboard, the top part of which was divided into shelves where the nursery cups and saucers and those sort of things stood. The drawer above Floss's was nurse's, where she kept her work, and a few books, and a little note-paper and so on; and the drawer at the bottom, so that he could easily reach it, was Carrots' own.

One end of Floss's drawer was given up to her dolls. She still had a good many, for though she did not care for them now as much as she used, she never could be persuaded to throw any of them away. But they were not very pretty; even Carrots could see that, and Carrots, to tell the truth, was very fond of dolls.

"If I had some money," he said to himself, "I would buy Floss such a most beautiful doll. I wish I had some money."

For the moment he forgot about the hoops and the "plan" and sat down on a little stool with one of the unhappiest looking of the dolls in his arms.

"A yellow sixpenny, oh, how nice!"

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"I wish I could buy you a new face, poor dolly," he said. "I wish I had some money."

He got up again to put poor dolly back into her corner. As he was smoothing down the paper which lined the drawer, he felt something hard close to dolly's foot; he pushed away the dolls to see—there, almost hidden by a crumple in the paper lay a tiny little piece of money—a little shining piece, about the size of a sixpence, only a different colour.

"A yellow sixpenny, oh, how nice!" thought Carrots, as he seized it. "I wonder if Floss knowed it was there. It would just do to buy a new doll. I *wish* I could go to the toy-shop to buy one to surprise Floss. I won't tell Floss I've found it. I'll keep it for a secret, and some day I'll buy Floss a new doll. I'm sure Floss doesn't know—I think the fairies must have put it there."

He wrapped the piece of money up carefully in a bit of paper, and after considering where he could

best hide it, so that Floss should not know till it was time to surprise her, he fixed on a beautiful place—he hid it under one of the little round saucers in his paint-box—a very old paint-box it was, which had descended from Jack, first to Mott and then to Carrots, but which, all the same, Carrots considered one of his greatest treasures.

When nurse came into the room, she found the tidying of the drawer completed, and Carrots sitting quietly by the window. He did not tell her about the money he had found, it never entered into his little head that he should speak of it. He had got into the way of not telling all the little things that happened to him to any one but Floss, for he was naturally a very quiet child, and nurse was getting too old to care about all the tiny interests of her children as she once had done. Besides, he had determined to keep it a secret, even from Floss, till he could buy a new doll with it—but very likely

he would have told her of it after all, had not something else put it out of his head.

The something else was that that afternoon nurse took Floss and him a long walk, and a walk they were very fond of.

It was to the cottage of the old woman, who, ever since they had come to Sandyshore, had washed for them. She was a very nice old woman, and her cottage was beautifully clean, and now and then Floss and Carrots had gone with nurse to have tea with her, which was a great treat. But to-day they were not going to tea; they were only going because nurse had to pay Mrs. White some money for washing up Jack's things quickly, and nurse knew the old woman would be glad to have it, as it was close to the day on which she had to pay her rent.

Floss and Carrots were delighted to go, for even when they did not stay to tea, Mrs. White always gave them a glass of milk, and, generally, a piece of home-made cake.

Before they started, nurse went to her drawer and took out of it a very small packet done up in white paper, and this little packet she put intc her purse.

It was, after all, a nice fine day. Floss and Carrots walked quietly beside nurse for a little, and then she gave them leave to run races, which made the way seem very short, till they got to Mrs. White's.

"How nice it will be when we have our hoops, won't it, Carrots?" said Floss.

Carrots had almost forgotten about the hoops, but now that Floss mentioned them, it put him in mind of something else.

"Wouldn't you like a new doll, Floss?" he said mysteriously, "a most beautifullest new doll, with hair like—like the angels' hairs in the big window at church, and eyes like the little blue stones in mamma's ring?"

"Of course I would," said Floss, "and we'd call

her Angelina, wouldn't we Carrots? But it's no good thinking about it—I shall never have one like that, unless the fairies send it me!"

"If the fairies sended you money to buy one, wouldn't that do?" said Carrots, staring up in her face with a funny look in his eyes.

But before Floss had time to answer, nurse called to them—they were at the corner of the lane which led to Mrs. White's.

Mrs. White was very kind. She had baked a cake only a day or two before, and cut off a beautiful big piece for each of the children, then she gave them a drink of milk, and they ran out into her little garden to eat their cake and look at the flowers, till nurse had finished her business with the old washerwoman, and was ready to go home.

Floss and Carrots thought a great deal of Mrs. White's garden. Small as it was, it had far more flowers in it than their own garden at the back of the Cove House, for it was a mile or two farther from

the sea, and the soil was richer, and it was more sheltered from the wind.

In summer there was what Floss called quite a "buzzy" sound in this little garden—she meant that sweet, lazy-busy hum of bees and butterflies and all sorts of living creatures, that you never hear except in a real old-fashioned garden where there are lots of clove pinks and sweet williams and roses, roses especially, great, big cabbage roses, and dear little pink climbing roses, the kind that peep in at a cottage window to bid you "good morning." Oh, how very sweet those old-fashioned flowers are—though "rose fanciers" and all the clever gardeners we have now-a-days wouldn't give anything for them! *I* think them the sweetest of all. Don't you, children? Or is it only when one begins to grow old-fashioned oneself and to care more for things that used to be than things that are now, that one gets to prize these old friends so?

I am wandering away from Floss and Carrots

waiting for nurse in the cottage garden; you must forgive me, boys and girls—when people begin to grow old they get in the habit of telling stories in a rambling way, but I don't find children so hard upon this tiresome habit as big people sometimes are. And it all comes back to me so—even the old washerwoman's cottage I can see so plainly, and the dear straggly little garden!

For you see, children, I am telling you the history of a *real* little boy and girl, not fancy children, and that is why, though there is nothing very wonderful about Floss and Carrots, I hope the story of their little pleasures and sorrows and simple lives may be interesting to you.

But I must finish about the visit to the washerwoman in another chapter, I have made this one rather too long already.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOST HALF-SOVEREIGN.

"Children should not leave about
Anything that's small and bright;
Lest the fairies spy it out,
And fly off with it at night."

Poems written for a child.

THERE was no buzzy sound in Mrs. White's garden this afternoon. It was far too early in the year for that, indeed it was beginning to feel quite chilly and cold, as the afternoons often do of fine days in early spring, and by the time Floss and Carrots had eaten their cake, and examined all the rose bushes to see if they could find any buds, and wished it were summer, so that there would be some strawberries hiding under the glossy green leaves, they began to wonder why nurse was so long—and to feel rather cold and tired of waiting.

"Just run to the door, Carrots, dear," said Floss, "and peep in to see if nurse is coming."

She did not like to go herself, for she knew that nurse and Mrs. White were fond of a comfortable talk together and might not like to be interrupted by her. But Carrots they would not mind.

Carrots set off obediently, but before he got to the door he met nurse coming out. She was followed by Mrs. White and both were talking rather earnestly.

"You'll let me know, if so be as you find it, Mrs. Hooper; you won't forget?"—Mrs. White was saying—Hooper was nurse's name—"for I feel quite oneasy—I do that, for you."

"I'll let you know, and thank you, Mrs. White," said nurse. "I'm glad I happened to bring some of my own money with me too, for I should have been sorry to put you to any ill-convenience by my carelessness—though how I could have been so careless as to mislay it, I'm sure it's more than I can say."

"It is, indeed, and you so careful," said Mrs. White sympathisingly.

Just then nurse caught sight of Carrots.

"Come along, Master Carrots," she said, "I was just going to look for you. Wherever's Miss Floss? We must be quick; it's quite time we were home."

"I'll tell Floss," said Carrots, disappearing again down the path, and in another moment Floss and he ran back to nurse.

Though they had been very quick, nurse seemed to think they had been slow. She even scolded Floss a very little as if she had been kept waiting by her and Carrots, when she was in a hurry to go, and both Floss and Carrots felt that this was very hard when the fact was that they had been waiting for nurse till they were both tired and cold.

"It wasn't Floss's fault. Floss wanted *you* to come quick, and she sended me to see," said Carrots indignantly.

"Hold your tongue, Master Carrots," said nurse sharply.

Carrots' face got very red, he gave nurse one reproachful look, but did not speak. He took Floss's hand and pulled her on in front. But Floss would not go; she drew her hand away.

"No, Carrots, dear," she said in a low voice, "it wouldn't be kind to leave nurse all alone when she is sorry about something."

"Is she sorry about somesing?" said Carrots.

"Yes," replied Floss, "I am sure she is. You run on for a minute. I want to speak to nurse."

Carrots ran on and Floss stayed behind.

"Nurse," she said softly, slipping her hand through nurse's arm, which, by stretching up on tip-toe, she was just able to do, "nurse, dear, what's the matter?"

"Nothing much, Miss Flossie," replied nurse, patting the kind little hand, "nothing much, but I'm growing an old woman and easy put out

—and such a stupid like thing for me to have done!"

"What have you done? What is stupid?" inquired Floss, growing curious as well as sympathising.

"I have lost a half-sovereign—a ten-shilling piece in gold, Miss Flossie," replied nurse.

"Out of your pocket—dropped it, do you mean?" said Floss.

"Oh no—I had it in my purse—at least I thought I had," said nurse. "It was a half-sovereign of your mamma's that she gave me to pay Mrs. White with for Master Jack's things and part of last week that was left over, and I wrapped it up with a shilling, and a sixpence—it came to eleven and six, altogether—in a piece of paper, and put it in my drawer in the nursery, and before I came out I put the packet in my purse. And when I opened it at Mrs. White's no half sovereign was there! Only the shilling and the sixpence!"

"You didn't drop it at Mrs. White's, did you? Should we go back and look?" said Floss, standing still, as if ready to run off that moment.

"No, no, my dear. It's not at Mrs. White's. She and I searched all over, and she's as honest a body as could be," replied nurse. "No, there's just the chance of its being in the drawer at home. I feel all in a fever till I get there to look. But don't you say anything about it, Miss Flossie; it's my own fault, and no one must be troubled about it but myself."

"Poor nursie," said Floss, "I'm so sorry. But you're sure to find it in your drawer. Let's go home very fast. Carrots," she called out to the little figure obediently trotting on in front, "Carrots, come and walk with nursie and me now. Nurse isn't vexed."

Carrots turned back, looking up wistfully in nurse's face.

"Poor darlings," said the old woman to herself,

"such a shame of me to have spoilt their walk!"

And all the way home, "to make up," she was even kinder than usual.

But her hopes of finding the lost piece of money were disappointed. She searched all through the drawer in vain; there was no half-sovereign to be seen. Suddenly it struck her that Carrots had been busy "tidying" for Floss that morning.

"Master Carrots, my dear," she said, "when you were busy at Miss Floss's drawer to-day, you didn't open mine, did you, and touch anything in it?"

"Oh, no," said Carrots, at once, "I'm quite, quite *sure* I didn't, nursie."

"You're sure you didn't touch nurse's purse, or a little tiny packet of white paper, in her drawer?" inquired Floss, with an instinct that the circumstantial details might possibly recal some forgotten remembrance to his mind.

"*Quite* sure," said Carrots, looking straight up in

their faces with a thoughtful, but not uncertain expression in his brown eyes.

"Because nurse has lost something out of her drawer, you see, Carrots dear, and she is very sorry about it," continued Floss.

"What has she lost? But I'm *sure*," repeated Carrots, "I didn't touch nurse's drawer, nor nucken in it. What has nurse lost?"

"A half-sovereign—" began Floss, but nurse interrupted her.

"Don't tease him any more about it," she said; "it's plain he doesn't know, and I wouldn't like the other servants to hear. Just forget about it, Master Carrots, my dear, perhaps nurse will find it some day."

So Carrots, literally obedient, asked no more questions. He only said to himself, with a puzzled look on his face, "A half sovereign! I didn't know nurse had any sovereigns—I thought only Floss had—and I never saw any broken in halfs!"

But as no more was said in his hearing about the matter, it passed from his innocent mind.

Nurse thought it right to tell the children's mother of her loss, and the girls and Maurice heard of it too. They all were very sorry for nurse, for she took her own carelessness rather sorely to heart. But by her wish, nothing was said of it to the two other servants, one of whom had only lately come, though the other had been with them many years.

"I'd rather by far bear the loss," said nurse, "than cause any ill-feeling about it, ma'am."

And her mistress gave in to her. "Though certainly *you* must not bear the loss, nurse," she said, kindly; "for in all these years you have saved me too many half-sovereigns and whole ones too for me to mind much about the loss of one. And you've asked Carrots, you say; you're sure he knows nothing about it?"

"Quite sure, ma'am," said nurse, unhesitatingly.

And several days went on, and nothing more was

said or heard about the half-sovereign. Only all this time the little yellow sixpenny lay safely hidden away in Carrots' paint-box.

In a sense he had forgotten about it. He knew it was safe there, and he had almost fixed in his mind not to tell Floss about it till the day they should be going to the toy-shop to buy their hoops. Once or twice he had been on the point of showing it to her, but had stopped short, thinking how much more delightful it would be to "surprise" her. He had quite left off puzzling his head as to where the little coin had come from; he had found it in Floss's drawer, that was quite enough. If he had any thoughts about its history, they were that either Floss had had "the sixpenny" a long time ago and had forgotten it, or that the fairies had brought it; and on the whole he inclined to the latter explanation, for you see there was something different about this sixpenny to any he had ever seen before.

Very likely "fairies' sixpennies" are always that pretty yellow colour, he thought.

One day, about a week after the loss of the half-sovereign, Maurice happened to come into the nursery just at the little ones' tea-time. It was a half-holiday, and he had been out a long walk with some of his companions, for he still went to school at Sandyshore, and now he had come in tremendously hungry and thirsty.

"I say, nurse," he exclaimed, seating himself unceremoniously at the table, "I'm awfully hungry, and mamma's out, and we shan't have tea for two hours yet. And Carrots, young man, I want your paint-box; mine's all gone to smash, and Cecil won't lend me hers, and I want to paint flags with stars and stripes for my new boat."

"Tars and tipes," repeated Carrots, "what's tars and tipes?"

"What's that to you?" replied Mott, politely. Ass me, I am so thirsty. Give me your tea.

Carrots, and nurse will make you some more. What awful weak stuff! But I'm too thirsty to wait."

He seized Carrots' mug and drank off its contents at one draught. But when he put the mug down he made a *very* wry face.

"What horrible stuff!" he exclaimed. "Nurse, you've forgotten to put in any sugar."

"No, she hasn't," said Carrots, bluntly.

Nurse smiled, but said nothing, and Floss looked fidgety.

"What do you mean?" said Mott. "Don't you like sugar—eh, young 'un?"

"Yes, I do like it," replied Carrots, but he would say no more.

Floss grew more and more uneasy.

"Oh, Mott," she burst out, "please don't tease Carrots. It's nothing wrong; it's only something we've planned ourselves."

Mott's curiosity was by this time thoroughly aroused.

"A secret, is it?" he exclaimed, pricking up his ears; "you'd best tell it me. I'm a duffer at keeping secrets. Out with it."

Floss looked ready to cry, and Carrots shut his mouth tight, as if determined not to give in. Nurse thought it time to interfere.

"Master Maurice," she said, appealingly, "don't tease the poor little things, there's a good boy. If it is a secret, there's no harm in it, you may be sure."

"Tease!" repeated Mott, virtuously, "I'm not teasing. I only want to know what the mystery is —why shouldn't I? I won't interfere."

Now Mott was just at the age when the spirit of mischief is most apt to get thorough hold of a boy; and once this *is* the case, who can say where or at what a boy will stop? Every opposition or contradiction only adds fuel to the flames, and not seldom a tiny spark may thus end in a great fire Nurse knew something of boys in general, and of

Mott in particular; and knowing what she did, she decided in her own mind that she had better take the bull by the horns without delay.

"Miss Floss," she said seriously, "and Master Carrots, I think you had better tell your brother your secret. He'll be very kind about it, you'll see, and he wont tell anybody."

"Won't you, Mott?" said Floss, jumping up and down on her chair in her anxiety. "Promise."

"Honour bright," said Mott.

Carrots opened his mouth as if about to speak, but shut it down again.

"What were *you* going to say?" said Mott.

"Nucken," replied Carrots.

"People don't open their mouths like that, if they've 'nucken' to say," said Mott, as if he didn't believe Carrots.

"I didn't mean that I wasn't *going* to say nucken," said Carrots, "I mean I haven't nucken to say now."

"And what were you going to say?" persisted Mott.

Carrots looked frightened.

"I was only sinking if you knowed, and nurse knowed, and Floss knowed, and I knowed, it wouldn't be a secret."

Mott burst out laughing.

"What a precious goose you are," he exclaimed. "Well, secret or no secret, I'm going to hear it; so tell me."

Floss looked at nurse despairingly.

"You tell, nurse, please," she said.

So nurse told, and Maurice looked more amused than ever. "What an idea!" he exclaimed. "I don't believe Carrots 'll hold out for a month, whatever Floss may do, unless he has a precious lump of ac— ac— what is it the head people call it?— acquisitiveness for his age. But you needn't have made such a fuss about your precious secret. Here, nurse, give us some tea, and you may put

in all the sugar Floss and Carrots have saved by now."

Floss and Carrots looked ready to cry, but nurse reassured them.

"Never you fear," she said; "he shall have what's proper, but no more. Never was such a boy for sweet things as you, Master Mott."

"It shows in my temper, doesn't it?" he said saucily. And then he was so pleased with his own wit that for a few minutes he forgot to teaze, occupying himself by eating lots of bread and butter instead, so that tea went on peaceably.

CHAPTER V.

CARROTS IN TROUBLE.

"But bitter while they flow, are childish tears."

"Now Carrots," said Mott, when he had eaten what he considered might possibly support him for the next two hours, "now Carrots, let's have the paint-box. You needn't disturb yourself," he continued, for Carrots was preparing to descend from his high chair, "I know where you keep it; it's in your drawer, isn't it. Which is his drawer, nurse? It'll be a good opportunity for me to see if he keeps it tidy."

"No, no, let me get it myself," cried Carrots, tumbling himself off his chair anyhow in his eagerness. "Nurse, nurse, don't tell him which is mine;

don't let him take my paint-box, let me get it my own self."

Nurse looked at him with some surprise; it was seldom the little boy so excited himself.

"Master Mott won't hurt your drawer, my dear," she said; "you don't mind his having your paint-box, I'm sure. But do let him get it out himself, if he wants, Master Maurice, there's a dear boy," she continued, for Maurice was by this time ferreting in Floss's drawer with great gusto, and in another moment would have been at Carrots'! But Carrots was at it before him. He pulled it open as far as he could, for in consequence of Mott's investigations in the upper story, he could not easily penetrate to his own quarters. But he knew exactly where the paint-box lay, and managed to slip it out, without Maurice's noticing what he was doing. His triumph was short-lived, however; before he could open the box, Mott was after him.

"Hi. you young sneak!" he cried, "what are you

after now? Give me the box; I believe you want to take the best paints out before you lend it to me," and he wrenched the paint-box out of his little brother's hands.

"I don't, I don't," sobbed Carrots, sitting down on the floor and crying bitterly; "you may have all the paints, Mott, but it's my secret, oh, my secret!"

"What are you talking about?" said Mott roughly, pulling out the lid as he spoke. The box had been all tumbled about in the struggle, and the paints came rattling out, the paints and the brushes, and the little saucers, and with them came rolling down on to the floor, children, you know what—the "fairies' sixpenny," the little bright shining yellow half-sovereign!

A strange change came over Mott's face.

"Nurse," he cried, "do you see that? What does that mean?"

Nurse hastened up to where he was standing on the same;

she stared for a moment in puzzled astonishment at the spot on the carpet to which the toe of Maurice's boot was pointing, then she stooped down slowly and picked up the coin, still without speaking.

"Well, nurse," said Maurice, impatiently, "what do you think of that?"

"My half-sovereign," said nurse, as if hardly believing what she saw.

"Of course it's your half-sovereign," said Mott, "it's as plain as a pike-staff. But how did it come there, that's the question?"

Nurse looked at Carrots with puzzled perplexity. "He couldn't have known," she said in a low voice, too low for Carrots to hear. He was still sitting on the floor sobbing, and through his sobs was to be heard now and then the melancholy cry, "My secret, oh, my poor secret."

"You hear what he says," said Maurice; "what does his 'secret' mean but that he sneaked into

your drawer and took the half-sovereign, and now doesn't like being found out. I'm ashamed to have him for my brother, that I am, the little cad!"

"But he couldn't have understood," said nurse, at a loss how otherwise to defend her little boy. "I'm not even sure that he rightly knew of my losing it, and he might have taken it, meaning no harm, not knowing what it was, indeed, very likely."

"Rubbish," said Maurice. "A child that is going without sugar to get money instead, must be old enough to understand something about what money is."

"But that was *my* plan; it wasn't Carrots that thought of it at all," said Floss, who all this time had stood by, frightened and distressed, not knowing what to say.

"Hold your tongue, Floss," said Maurice, roughly; and Floss subsided. "Carrots," he continued, turning to his brother, "leave off crying this

minute, and listen to me. Who put this piece of money into your paint-box?"

"I did my own self," said Carrots.

"What for?"

"To keep it a secret for Floss," sobbed Carrots.

Maurice turned triumphantly to nurse.

"There," he said, "you see! And," he continued to Carrots again, "you took it out of nurse's drawer—out of a little paper packet?"

"No," said Carrots, "I didn't. I didn't know it was nurse's."

"You didn't know nurse had lost a half-sovereign!" exclaimed Mott, "Carrots, how dare you say so?"

"Yes," said Carrots, looking so puzzled, that for a moment or two he forgot to sob, "I did know, Floss told me."

"Then how *can* you say you didn't know this was nurse's?" said Mott.

"Oh, I don't know—I didn't know—I can't

under'tand," cried Carrots, relapsing into fresh sobs.

"I wish your mamma were in, that I do," said nurse, looking ready to cry too; by this time Floss's tears were flowing freely.

"She isn't in, so it's no good wishing she were," said Maurice; "but papa is," he went on importantly, "and I'll just take Carrots to him and see what *he'll* say to all this."

"Oh, no, Master Mott, don't do that, I beg and pray of you," said nurse, all but wringing her hands in entreaty. "Your papa doesn't understand about the little ones; do wait till your mamma comes in."

"No, indeed, nurse; it's a thing papa *should* be told," said Mott, in his innermost heart half inclined to yield, but working himself up to imagine he was acting very heroically. And notwithstanding nurse's distress, and Floss's tears, off he marched his unfortunate little brother to the study.

"Papa," he said, knocking at the door, "may I come in? There's something I must speak to you about immediately."

"Come in, then," was the reply. "Well, and what's the matter now? Has Carrots hurt himself?' asked his father, naturally enough, for his red-haired little son looked pitiable in the extreme as he crept into the room after Maurice, frightened, bewildered, and, so far as his gentle disposition was capable of such a feeling, indignant also, all at once.

"No," replied Maurice, pushing Carrots forward, "he's not hurt himself; it's worse than that. Papa," he continued excitedly, "you whipped me once, when I was a little fellow, for telling a story. I am very sorry to trouble you, but I think it's right you should know; I am afraid you will have to punish Carrots more severely than you punished me, for he's done worse than tell a story." Maurice stopped to take breath, and looked at his father to see the effect of his words. Carrots had stopped

crying to listen to what Maurice was saying, and there he stood, staring up with his large brown eyes, two or three tears still struggling down his cheeks, his face smeared and red and looking very miserable. Yet he did not seem to be in the least ashamed of himself, and this somehow provoked Mott and hardened him against him.

"What's he been doing?" said their father, looking at the two boys with more amusement than anxiety, and then glancing regretfully at the newspaper which he had been comfortably reading when Mott's knock came to the door.

"He's done much worse then tell a story," repeated Maurice, "though for that matter he's told two or three stories too. But, papa, you know about nurse losing a half-sovereign? Well, *Carrots* had got it all the time; he took it out of nurse's purse, and hid it away in his paint-box, without telling anybody. He can't deny it, though he tried to."

"Carrots," said his father sternly, "is this true?"

Carrots looked up in his father's face; that face, generally so kind and merry, was now all gloom and displeasure—why?—Carrots could not understand, and he was too frightened and miserable to collect his little wits together to try to do so. He just gave a sort of little tremble and began to cry again.

"Carrots," repeated his father, "is this true?"

"I don't know," sobbed Carrots.

Now Captain Desart, Carrots' father, was, as I think I have told you, a sailor. If any of you children have a sailor for your father, you must not think I mean to teach you to be disrespectful when I say that sailors *are*, there is no doubt, inclined to be hot-tempered and hasty. And I do not think on the whole that they understand much about children, though they are often very fond of them and very kind. All this was the case with Carrots' father. He had been so much away from his

children while they were little, that he really hardly knew how they had been brought up or trained or anything about their childish ways—he had left them entirely to his wife, and scarcely considered them as in any way "*his* business," till they were quite big boys and girls.

But once he did begin to notice them, though very kind, he was very strict. He had most decided opinions about the only way of checking their faults whenever these were serious enough to attract his attention, and he could not and would not be troubled with arguing, or what he called "splitting hairs," about such matters. A fault was a fault; telling a falsehood was telling a falsehood; and he made no allowance for the excuses or "palliating circumstances" there might be to consider. One child, according to his ideas, was to be treated exactly like another; why the same offence should deserve severer punishment with a self-willed, self-confident, bold, matter-of-fact lad, such

as Maurice, than with a timid, fanciful, baby-like creature as was his little Fabian, he could not have understood had he tried.

Nurse knew all this by long experience; no wonder, kind though she knew her master to be, that she trembled when Mott announced his intention of laying the whole affair before his father.

But poor Carrots did not know anything about it. "Papa" had never been "cross" to him before, and he was far from clearly understanding why he was "cross" to him now. So he just sobbed and said "I don't know," which was about the worst thing he could possibly have said in his own defence, though literally the truth.

"No or yes, sir," said Captain Desart, his voice growing louder and sterner—I think he really forgot that it was a poor little shrimp of six years old he was speaking to—"no nonsense of 'don't knows.' Did you or did you not take nurse's half

sovereign out of her drawer and keep it for your own."

"No," said Carrots, "I never took nucken out of nurse's drawer. I never did, papa, and I didn't know nurse had any sovereigns."

"Didn't you know nurse had *lost* a half-sovereign? Carrots, how can you say so?" interrupted Mott.

"Yes, Floss told me," said Carrots.

"And Floss hid it away in your paint-box, I suppose?" said Mott, sarcastically.

"No, Floss didn't. I hided the sixpenny my own self," said Carrots, looking more and more puzzled.

"Hold your tongue, Maurice," said his father, angrily. "Go and fetch the money and the tom-fool paint-box thing that you say he had it in."

Mott did as he was told. He ran to the nursery and back as fast as he could; but, unobserved by him, Floss managed to run after him and crept into the study so quietly that her father never noticed her.

Maurice laid the old paint-box and the half-sovereign down on the table in front of his father; Captain Desart held up the little coin between his finger and thumb.

"Now," he said, "Carrots, look at this. Did you or did you not take this piece of money out of nurse's drawer and hide it away in your paint-box?"

Carrots stared hard at the half-sovereign.

"I did put it in my paint-box," he said, and then he stopped.

"What for?" said his father.

"I wanted to keep it for a secret," he replied. "I wanted to— to——"

"*What?*" thundered Captain Desart.

"To buy something at the toy-shop with it," sobbed Carrots.

Captain Desart sat down and looked at Mott for sympathy.

"Upon my soul," he said, "one could hardly

believe it. A child that one would think scarcely knew the value of money! Where can he have learnt such cunning; you say you are sure he was told of nurse's having lost a half-sovereign?"

"Oh, yes," said Mott; "he confesses to that much himself."

"Floss told me," said Carrots.

"Then how can you pretend you didn't know this was nurse's—taking it out of her drawer, too,' said his father.

"I don't know. I didn't take it out of her drawer; it was 'aside Floss's doll," said Carrots.

"He's trying to equivocate," said his father. Then he turned to the child again, looking more determined than ever.

"Carrots," he said, "I must whip you for this. Do you know that I am ashamed to think you are my son? If you were a poor boy you might be put in prison for this."

Carrots looked too bewildered to understand. "In

prison," he repeated. "Would the prison-man take me?"

"What does he mean?" said Captain Desart.

Floss, who had been waiting unobserved in her corner all this time, thought this a good opportunity for coming forward.

"He means the policeman," she said. "Oh, papa," she went on, running up to her little brother and throwing her arms round him, the tears streaming down her face, "oh, papa, poor little Carrots! he *doesn't* understand."

"Where did *you* come from?" said her father, gruffly but not unkindly, for Floss was rather a favourite of his. "What do you mean about his not understanding? Did you know about this business, Floss?"

"Oh no, papa," said Floss, her face flushing; "I'm too big not to understand."

"Of course you are," said Captain Desart; and Carrots is big enough, too, to understand the very

plain rule that he is not to touch what does not belong to him. He was told, too, that nurse had lost a half-sovereign, and he might then have owned to having taken it and given it back, and then things would not have looked so bad. Take him up to my dressing-room, Maurice, and leave him there till I come."

"May I go with him, papa?" said Floss very timidly.

"No," said her father, "you may not."

So Mott led off poor weeping Carrots, and all the way upstairs he kept sobbing to himself, "I never touched nurse's sovereigns. I never did. I didn't know she had any sovereigns."

"Hold your tongue," said Mott; "what is the use of telling more stories about it?"

"I didn't tell stories. I said I hided the sixpenny my own self, but I never touched nurse's sovereigns; I never did."

"I believe you're more than half an idiot," said

Mott, angry and yet sorry—angry with himself, too, somehow.

Floss, left alone with her father, ventured on another appeal.

"You won't whip Carrots till mamma comes in, will you, papa?" she said softly.

"Why not? Do you think I want her to help me to whip him?" said Captain Desart.

"Oh no—but—I think perhaps mamma would understand better how it was, for, oh papa, dear, Carrots *isn't* a naughty boy; he never, never tells stories."

"Well, we'll see," replied her father; "and in the meantime it will do him no harm to think things over by himself in my dressing-room for a little."

"Oh, poor Carrots!" murmured Floss to herself; "it'll be getting dark, and he's all alone. I *wish* mamma would come in!"

CHAPTER VI.

CARROTS "ALL ZIGHT" AGAIN.

"When next the summer breeze comes by,
And waves the bush, the flower is dry."

Walter Scott.

Floss crept upstairs to the dressing-room door. It was locked. Though the key was in the lock, she knew she must not turn it; and even had it been open she would not have dared to go in, after her father's forbidding it. But she thought she might venture to speak to Carrots, to comfort him a little, through the door. She was dreadfully afraid that he might feel frightened in there alone if it got dark before he was released, for sometimes he *was* afraid of the dark—he was such a little boy, remember.

Floss tapped at the door.

"Carrots," she said, "are you there?"

Floss tapped at the door. "Carrots," she said, "are you there?"

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"Yes," said Carrots; "but you can't come in, Floss. Mott has locked me in."

"I know," said Floss; "what are you doing, Carrots. Are you very unhappy?"

"Not so very. I'm crying—I'm crying a great lot, Floss, but I don't think I'm so very unhappy—not now you've come to the door."

"Poor Carrots," said Floss, "I'll stay by the door, if you like. I'll just run down to the front door now and then, to see if mamma is coming, and then I'll come straight back to you."

"All zight," said Carrots. Whenever he wanted to seem very brave, and rather a big boy, he used to say "all zight," and just now he was trying very hard to be like a big boy.

There was silence for a minute or two. Then Carrots called out again.

"Floss," he said, "are you there?"

"Yes, dear," replied faithful Floss.

"I want just to tell you *one* thing,' he said.

"Floss, I never did touch nurse's sovereigns. I never knowed she had any."

"It wasn't a sovereign; it was a *half*-sovereign," corrected Floss.

"I don't under'tand how it *could* be a half-sovereign," said Carrots. "But I never touched nurse's drawer, nor nucken in it."

"Then where *did* you find the half-sovereign?" began Floss, "and why—oh, Carrots," she broke off, "I do believe that's the front door bell. It'll be mamma coming. I must run down."

"All zight," called out Carrots again. "Don't be long, Floss; but please tell mamma all about it. I *don't* under'tand."

He gave a little sigh of perplexity, and lay down on the floor near the window, where the room was lightest, for the darkness was now beginning to creep in, and he felt very lonely.

Poor Mrs. Desart hardly knew what to think or say, when, almost before she had got into the house,

she was seized upon by Maurice and Floss, each eager to tell their own story. *Carrots* naughty, *Carrots* in disgrace, was such an extraordinary idea!

"Nurse," she exclaimed, perceiving her at the end of the passage, whence she had been watching as anxiously as the children for her mistress's return, "nurse, what is the meaning of it all?"

"Indeed, ma'am," nurse was beginning, but she was interrupted. "Come in here, Lucy," said Captain Desart to his wife, opening the study door, "come in here before you go upstairs."

And Mrs. Desart did as he asked, but Floss again managed to creep in too, almost hidden in the folds of her mother's dress.

"I can't believe that Carrots is greedy, or cunning, or obstinate," said his mother, when she had heard all. "I cannot think that he understood what he was doing when he took the half-sovereign."

"But the hiding it," said Captain Desart, "the

hiding it, and yet to my face persisting that he had never touched nurse's half-sovereign. I can't make the child out."

"He says he didn't know nurse had any sovereigns," put in Floss.

"Are you there again, you ubiquitous child?" said her father.

Floss looked rather frightened—such a long word as ubiquitous must surely mean something very naughty; but her father's voice was not angry, so she took courage.

"Does he know what a sovereign means?" said Mrs. Desart. "Perhaps there is some confusion in his mind which makes him seem obstinate when he isn't so really."

"He said he knew *I* had sovereigns," said Floss, "and I couldn't think what he meant. Oh, mamma," she went on suddenly, "I do believe I know what he was thinking of. It was my kings and queens."

And before her father or mother could stop her,

she had darted off to the nursery. In two minutes she was back again, holding out to her mother a round wooden box—the sort of box one often used to see with picture alphabets for little children, but instead of an alphabet, Floss's box contained a set of round cards, each about the size of the top of a wine-glass, with the heads of all the English kings and queens, from William the Conqueror down to Victoria!

"'Sovereigns of England,' mamma, you see," she exclaimed, pointing to the words on the lid, and quite out of breath with hurry and excitement, "and I very often call them my sovereigns; and of course Carrots didn't understand how there could be a *half* one of them, nor how nurse could have any."

"It must be so," said Mrs. Desart to her husband; "the poor child really did *not* understand."

"But still the taking the money at all, and hiding it?" said Captain Desart. "I don't see that it would be right not to punish him."

"He has been punished already—pretty severely for him, I fancy," said Floss's mother, with a rather sad smile. "You will leave him to me now, won't you, Frank?" she asked her husband. "I will go up and see him, and try to make him thoroughly understand. Give me the sovereigns, Floss dear, I'll take them with me."

Somewhat slowly, Carrots' mother made her way upstairs. She was tired and rather troubled. She did not believe that her poor little boy had really done wrong wilfully, but it seemed difficult to manage well among so many children; she was grieved, also, at Maurice's hastiness and want of tender feeling, and she saw, too, how little fitted Carrots was to make his way in this rough-and-ready world.

"How would it be without me! My poor children," she thought with a sigh.

But a little hand was slipped into hers.

"Mamma, dear, I'm *so* glad you thought of the sovereigns. I'm *sure* Carrots didn't mean to be

naughty. Mamma dear, though he *is* so little, Carrots always means to be good; I don't think he could even be frightened into doing anything that he understood was naughty, though he is so easily frightened other ways."

"My good little Floss, my comforter," said her mother, patting Floss's hand, and then they together made their way to the dressing-room.

It was almost dark. The key was in the lock, and Mrs. Desart felt for it and turned it. But when she opened the door it was too dark in the room to distinguish anything.

"Carrots," she said, but there was no answer. "Where can he be?" she said rather anxiously. "Floss, run and get a light."

Floss ran off: she was back again in a minute, for she had met nurse on the stairs with a candle in her hand. But even with the light they could not all at once find Carrots, and though they called to him there was no answer.

"Can he have got out of the window?" Mrs. Desart was beginning to say, when Floss interrupted her.

"Here he is, mamma," she exclaimed. "Oh, poor little Carrots! mamma, nursie, do look."

There he was indeed—fast, fast asleep! Extra fast sleep, for his troubles and his tears had worn him out. He was lying in a corner of a large closet opening out of the dressing-room. In this closet Captain Desart hung up his coats and dressing-gowns, and doubtless Carrots had crept into it when the room began to get dark, feeling as if in the hanging garments there was some comfort and protection; and there he lay, looking so fair and innocent, prettier than when he was awake, for his cheeks had more colour, and his long eye-lashes, reddy-brown like his hair, showed clearly on his fair skin.

"Poor little fellow, how sweet he looks," said Mrs. Desart. "Nurse, lift him up and try to put

him to bed without waking him. We must wait to disentangle the confusion in his mind till to-morrow morning."

And very tenderly nurse lifted him up and carried him off.

"My bonnie wee man," she murmured; for though it was many and many a day since she had seen her native land, and she had journeyed with her master and mistress to strange countries "far over the sea," she was apt when her feelings were stirred to fall back into her own childish tongue.

So no more was said to or about Carrots that evening; but Floss went to bed quite happy and satisfied that "mamma" would put it all right in the morning. I don't think Mott went to bed in so comfortable a mood; yet his mother had said nothing to him!

Cecil and Louise had, though. Cecil told him right out that he was a horrid tell-tale, and Louise said she only wished *he* had red hair instead of

Carrots; which expressions of feeling on the part of such very grown-up young ladies meant a good deal, for it was not often they troubled themselves much about nursery matters. Cecil, that is to say, for Louise, who was fair haired and soft and gentle, and played very nicely on the piano, was just a shadow of Cecil, and if Cecil had proposed that they should stay in bed all day and get up all night, would have thought it a very good idea!

And the next morning Mrs. Desart had a long talk with Carrots. It was all explained and made clear, and the difference between the two kinds of "sovereigns" shown to him. And he told his mother all—all, that is to say, except the "plan" for saving sugar and getting money instead, which had first put it into his head to keep the half-sovereign to get a new doll for Floss. He began to tell about the plan, but stopped when he remembered that it was Floss's secret as well as his own; and when he told his mother this, she said he was

quite right not to tell without Floss's leave, and that as nurse knew about it, they might still keep it for their secret, if they liked, which Carrots was very glad to hear.

He told his mother about his thinking perhaps the fairies had brought the "sixpenny," and she explained to him that now-a-days, alas! that was hardly likely to be the case, though she seemed quite to understand his fancying it, and did not laugh at him at all. But she spoke very gravely to him, too, about *never* taking anything that was not his; and after listening and thinking with all his might, Carrots said he thought he "kite under'tood."

"I am never, never to take nucken that I'm not sure is mine," he said slowly. "And if ever I'm not sure I'm to ask somebody, you, or nursie, or Floss—or *sometimes*, perhaps, Cecil. But I don't think I'd better ask Mott, for perhaps he wouldn't under'tand."

But Mott's mother took care that before the day was over Mott *should* "under'tand" something of where and how he had been in fault; that there are sometimes ways of doing *right* which turn it into "wrong;" and that want of pity and tenderness for the wrong *doer* never, never can be right.

CHAPTER VII.

A LONG AGO STORY.

"You may laugh, my little people.
But be sure my story's true;
For I vow by yon church steeple,
I was once a child like you."

The Land of Long Ago.

If any of you children have travelled much, have you noticed that on a long journey there seem to come points, turns—I hardly know what to call them—after which the journey seems to go on differently. More quickly, perhaps more cheerfully, or possibly less so, but certainly *differently*. Looking back afterwards you see it was so—"from the time we all looked out of the window at the ruined Abbey we seemed to get on so much faster," you would say, or—"after the steamer had passed the Spear-

head Point, we began to feel dull and tired, and there was no more sunshine."

I think it is so in life. Suddenly, often quite unknowingly, we turn a corner sometimes of our history, sometimes of our characters, and looking back, long afterwards, we make a date of that point. It was so just now with my little Carrots. This trouble of his about the half-sovereign changed him. I do not mean to say that it saddened him and made him less happy than he had been—at his age, thank God, few, if any children have it in them to be so deeply affected—but it *changed* him. It was his first peep out into life, and it gave him his first real *thoughts* about things. It made him see how a little wrong-doing may cause great sorrow; it gave him his first vague, misty glimpse of that, to my thinking, saddest of all sad things—the way in which it is possible for our very nearest and dearest to mistake and misunderstand us.

He had been in some ways a good deal of a baby

for his age, there is no doubt. He had a queer, baby-like way of not seeming to take in quickly what was said to him, and staring up in your face with his great oxen-like eyes, that did a little excuse Maurice's way of laughing at him and telling him he was "half-witted." But no one that really looked at those honest, sensible, tender eyes could for an instant have thought there was any "want" in their owner. It was all *there*—the root of all goodness, cleverness, and manliness—just as in the acorn there is the oak; but of course it had a great deal of *growing* before it, and, more than mere growing, it would need all the care and watchful tenderness and wise directing that could be given it, just as the acorn needs all the rain and sunshine and good nourishing soil it can get, to become a fine oak, straight and strong and beautiful. For what do I mean by "it," children? I mean the "own self" of Carrots, the wonderful "something" in the little childish frame which the wisest of all

the wise men of either long ago or now-a-days have never yet been able to describe—the "soul," children, which is in you all, which may grow into so beautiful, so lovely and perfect a thing; which may, alas! be twisted and stunted and starved out of all likeness to the "image" in which it was created.

Do you understand a little why it seems sometimes such a very, very solemn thing to have the charge of children? When one thinks what they *should* be, and again when one thinks what they *may* be, is it not a solemn, almost too solemn a thought? Only we, who feel this so deeply, take heart when we remember that the Great Gardener who never makes mistakes has promised to help us; even out of *our* mistakes to bring good.

As I have said, the affair of the lost half-sovereign did not leave any lastingly painful impression on Carrots, but for some days he seemed unusually quiet and pale and a little sad. He had caught cold, too, with falling asleep on the dressing-

room floor, nurse said, for the weather was still exceedingly chilly, though the spring was coming on. So altogether he was rather a miserable looking little Carrots.

He kept out of the way and did not complain, but "mamma" and nurse and Floss did not need complaints to make them see that their little man was not quite himself, and they were extra kind to him.

There came just then some very dull rainy days, regular rainy days, not stormy, but to the children much more disagreeable than had they been so. For in *stormy* weather at the seaside there is too much excitement for anyone to think whether it is disagreeable or not—there is the splendid sight of the angry, troubled sea, there are the wonderful "storm songs" of the wind to listen to. Of course, as Carrots used to say, at such times it is "dedful" to think of the poor sailors; but even in thinking of them there is something that takes one's thoughts quite away from one's self, and one's own

worries and troubles—all the marvellous stories of shipwreck and adventure, from Grace Darling to old Sinbad, come rushing into one's mind, and one feels as if the sea were the only part of the world worth living on.

But even at the seaside, regular, steady, "stupid" rainy days are trying. Carrots sat at the nursery window one of these dull afternoons looking out wistfully.

"Floss," he said, for Floss was sitting on the floor learning her geography for the next day, "Floss, it *is* so raining."

"I know," said Floss, stopping a minute in her "principal rivers of northern Europe." "I wish there wasn't so much rain, and then there wouldn't be so many rivers; or perhaps if there weren't so many rivers there wouldn't be so much rain. I wonder which it is!"

"Which beginned first—rivers or rain?" said Carrots, meditatively, "*that* would tell."

"I'm sure I don't know, and I don't believe anybody does," said Floss, going on again with her lesson. "Be quiet, Carrots, for one minute, and then I'll talk to you."

Carrots sat silent for about a minute and a half; then he began again.

"Floss," he said.

"Well," replied Floss, "I've very nearly done, Carrots."

"It's werry dull to-day, Floss; the sea looks dull too, it isn't dancey a bit to-day, and the sands look as if they would *never* be nice for running on again."

"Oh, but they will, Master Carrots," said nurse, who was sitting near, busy darning stockings. "Dear, dear! don't I remember feeling just so when I was a child? In winter thinking summer would never come, and in summer forgetting all about winter!"

"Is it a werry long time since you were a

child?" inquired Carrots, directing his attention to nurse.

"It's getting on for a good long time, my dear," said nurse, with a smile.

"Please tell me about it," said Carrots.

"Oh yes, nursie dear, do," said Floss, jumping up from the floor and shutting her book. "I've done all my lessons, and it would just be nice to have a story. It would amuse poor little Carrots."

"But you know all my stories as well, or even better, than I do myself," objected nurse, "not that they were ever much to tell, any of them."

"Oh yes, they were. They are very nice stories indeed," said Floss, encouragingly. "And I'm very fond of what you call your mother's stories, too—aren't you, Carrots?—about the children she was nurse to—Master Hugh and Miss Janet. Tell us more about them, nursie"

"You've heard all the stories about them, my dears, I'm afraid," said nurse. "At least, I can't

just now think of any worth telling but what you've heard."

"Well, let's hear some not worth the telling," said Floss, persistently. "Nurse," she went on, "how old must Master Hugh and Miss Janet be by now? Do you know where they are?"

"Master Hugh is dead," said nurse, "many a year ago, poor fellow, and little Miss Janet—why she was fifteen years older than I; mother only left them to be married when Miss Janet was past twelve. She must be quite an old lady by now, if she is alive—with grandchildren as old as you, perhaps! How strange it seems!"

"She must have been a very nice little girl, and so must Master Hugh have been—a nice little boy, I mean. That story of 'Mary Ann Jolly' was *so* interesting. I suppose they *never* did anything naughty?" said Floss, insinuatingly.

"Oh, but they did," replied nurse, quite unsuspicious of the trap laid for her. "Master Hugh

was very mischievous. Did I never tell you what they did to their dog Cæsar?"

"No, never," said both the children in a breath; "do tell us."

"Well, it was one Sunday morning, to tell it as mother told me," began nurse. "You know, my dears," she broke off again, "it was in Scotland, and rather an out-of-the-way part where they lived. I know the place well, of course, for it wasn't till I was seventeen past that I ever left it. It is a pretty place, out of the way even now, I'm told, with railways and all, and in those days it was even more out-of-the-way. Six miles from the church, and the prayers and the sermon very long when you got there! Many and many a time *I've* fallen asleep at church, when I was a little girl. Well, to go back to Master Hugh and Miss Janet. It was on a Sunday morning they did the queer piece of mischief I'm going to tell you of. They had been left at home with no one but an old woman, who was

too deaf to go to church, to look after them. She lived in the lodge close by, and used to come into the house to help when the servants were busy, for she was a very trusty old body. It was not often the children were left without mother, or perhaps one of the housemaids, to take care of them, and very often in fine weather they used to be taken to church themselves, though it was tiring like for such young things. But this Sunday, everybody had gone to church because it was the time of the preachings——"

"The *what*, nurse?" said Floss. "Isn't there preaching every Sunday at church?"

"Oh yes, my dear; but what we call the preachings in Scotland means the time when there is the communion service, which is only twice a year. You can't understand, my dear," seeing that Floss looked as mystified as ever; "but never mind. When you are older, you will find that there are many different ways of saying and doing the same

things in churches, just like among people. But this Sunday I am telling you of, the services were to be very long indeed, too long for the children, considering the six miles' drive and all. So they were left at home with old Phemie."

"Did they mind?" said Carrots.

"Oh no; I fancy they were very well pleased. They were always very happy together, the two of them and Cæsar."

"And of course they promised to be very good," said Floss.

"No doubt of that," said nurse, with a smile. "Well, they certainly hit upon a queer way of amusing themselves. Mother came home from church one of the earliest; she had a lift in one of the farmer's carts, and came in at the lodge gate just as the carriage with her master and mistress and the young ladies was driving up. They all got out at the big gate, and let the coachman drive round to the stable the back way, and mother came

quietly walking up the drive behind them. They were talking seriously about the sermon they had heard, and feeling rather solemn-like, I daresay, when all at once there flew down the drive to meet them the most fearsome-like creature that ever was seen. It was like nothing in nature, my mother said, about the size of a large wolf, but with a queer-shaped head and body—at least they looked queer to them, not knowing what it was—and not a particle of hair or coat of any kind upon it. It rushed up to my lady, that was Miss Janet's mother, and tried to leap upon her; but she shrieked to her husband, and he up with his stick—he always took a stick about with him—and was just on the point of giving it a fearful blow, never thinking but what it was one of the beasts escaped from some travelling show, when one of the young ladies caught his arm.

"'Stop, father!'" she cried. 'Don't you see who it is? It's *Cæsar*.'

"'*Cæsar!*' said he. 'My dear, *that's* never Cæsar.'

"But Cæsar it was, as they soon saw by the way he jumped and whined, and seemed to beg them to understand he was himself. He was frightened out of his wits, poor doggie, for he had never felt so queer before, and couldn't understand what had come over him."

"And what *had* come over him?" asked the children eagerly.

"Why, Master Hugh and Miss Janet had spent the morning in cropping him!" replied nurse. "The hair, and he had great long thick hair, was cut off as close and as neat as if it had been shaved; it was really wonderful how clean they had done it without cutting or wounding the poor doggie. They had taken great pains about it, and had spent the best part of the morning over it—the two of them, Master Hughie with the great kitchen scissors, and Miss Janet with a wee fine pair she had found in her mamma's workbox, the little monkey!

And such a sight as the kitchen dresser was with hair! For they told how they had made Cæsar jump up on to the dresser and lie first on one side and then on the other, till all was cut off."

"Were they punished?" asked Floss, anxiously. And at this question Carrots looked very woe-begone.

"They were *going* to be," said nurse, "but somehow, I cannot justly say how it was, they were let off. The whole thing was such a queer idea, their father and mother could not but laugh at it, though they didn't let the children see them. And what do you think my lady did? She took all poor Cæsar's hair and spun it up into worsted for knitting, mixing it, of course, with long yarn."

"Did *she* spin?" asked Floss. "I thought you said she was a lady."

"And that she was, Miss Flossie, and none the less so for being able to spin and to knit, and to cook too, I daresay," said nurse. "But ladies,

and high born ones too, in those days turned their hands to many things they think beneath them now. I know Miss Janet's mother would never have thought of letting any one but herself wash up her breakfast and tea services. The cups were a sight to be seen, certainly, of such beautiful old china; they were worth taking care of; and that's how old china has been kept together. There isn't much of what's in use now-a-days will go down to your grand-children, and great grand-children, Miss Flossie, with the smashing and dashing that goes on. My lady had a white wood bowl kept on purpose, and a napkin of the finest damask, and a large apron of fine holland that she put on, and, oh yes, a pair of embroidered holland cuffs she used to draw on over her sleeves up to the elbow; and a lady she looked, I can assure you, rinsing out and drying her beautiful cups, with her pretty white hands!"

"Did you ever see her?" asked Floss.

"Yes, when she was getting to be quite an old lady, I've seen her several times when I've been sent up a message by mother to the house. For my mother was a great favourite of hers; I never went there but my lady would have me in to have a piece."

"A *piece*?" repeated Floss.

Nurse laughed. "A slice of bread and jam, I should say, my dear. I forget that I'm far away from the old life when I get to talking of those days. And to think I'm getting on to be quite an old woman myself; older in some ways than my lady ever was, for my hair is fast turning grey, and hers had never a silver streak in it to the last day of her life, and she died at eighty-four!"

Carrots was getting a little tired, for he hardly understood all that nurse was saying. To create a diversion he climbed up on to her knee, and began stroking her face.

"Never mind, nursie," he said. "I'll always love

you, even when your hair's *kite* grey, and I would marry you if you like when I'm big, only I've promised to marry Floss."

"Oh you funny little Carrots," said Floss. "But nurse," she went on, "what did Janet's mamma do with the hair when she had spun it?"

"She knitted it into a pair of stockings for Master Hughie," said nurse; "but they weren't much use. They were well enough to look at, but no mortal boy could have worn them without his legs being skinned, they *were* so pricky."

"And what became of Cæsar?" said Floss. "Did his hair ever grow again?"

"Oh yes," said nurse, "in time it did, though I believe it never again looked quite so silky and nice. But Cæsar lived to a good old age, for all that. He didn't catch cold, for my lady made mother make him a coat of a bit of soft warm cloth, which he wore for some time."

"How funny he must have looked," said Floss.

"What are you talking about?" said a voice behind her, and turning round, Floss saw Cecil, who had come into the room without their hearing her.

"About a doggie," answered Carrots. "Oh, Cis, nurse has been telling us such a lubly story about a doggie. Nursie, dear, won't you tell us another to-morrow?"

"My stories are all worn out, my dear," said nurse, shaking her head.

"Couldn't *you* tell us one, Cis?" said Carrots.

"Make up one, do you mean?" said Cecil. "No, indeed, I'm sure I never could. Are they always at you to tell them stories, nurse? If so, I pity you."

"Poor little things," said nurse, "it's dull for them these wet days, Miss Cecil, and Master Carrots' cold has been bad."

Cecil looked at her little brother's pale face as he sat nestling in nurse's arms, and a queer new feeling of compunction seized her.

"I couldn't *tell* you a story," she said; "but if you like, the first afternoon it's rainy, and you can't go out, I'll *read* you one. Miss Barclay lent me a funny old-fashioned little book the other day, and some of the stories in it are fairy ones. Would you like that, Carrots?"

Floss clapped her hands, and Carrots slid down from nurse's knee, and coming quietly up to Cecil, threw his arms round her neck, and gave her a kiss.

"I hope it'll rain to-morrow," he said, gravely.

"It *is* kind of Miss Cecil," said nurse; and as Cecil left the nursery she added to herself, "it will be a comfort to her mother if she begins to take thought for the little ones, and I've always felt sure it was in her to do so, if only she could get into the way of it."

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE BEWITCHED TONGUE."

"Thou will not fail
To listen to a fairy tale."
Lewis Carroll.

It *did* rain the next day! And Cecil did not forget her promise. Just as the old nursery clock was striking four, a full hour still to her tea-time, she marched into the room with a little old brown book in her hand. I wonder if any of you have ever seen that little old book, or one like it, I should say? It was about the size of the first edition of 'Evenings at Home,' which some of you are sure to have in your book-cases. For I should think *everybody's* grandfathers and grandmothers had an 'Evenings at Home' among their few, dearly-prized children's books.

Do you know how very few those books were? You may have heard it, but I scarcely fancy you have ever thought over the great difference between yourselves and long-ago-children in this respect. Now-a-days, when you have galloped through all the brilliant blue and green and scarlet little volumes that have been given to you on birthdays and Christmas-days, you come with a melancholy face to your mother, and tell her you have "nothing to read." And then, most likely, when your mother goes to the library, she chooses a book for you out of the "juvenile department," and when it is done you get another, till you can hardly remember what you have read and what you haven't. But as for reading any book twice over, *that* is never to be thought of.

Not so was it long ago. Not only had no children many books, but everywhere children had the same! There was seldom any use in little friends lending to each other, for it was always the same

thing over again: 'Evenings at Home,' 'Sandford and Merton,' 'Ornaments Discovered,' and so on.

You think, I daresay, that it must have been very stupid and tiresome to have so little variety, but *I* think you are in some ways mistaken. Children really *read* their books in those days; they put more of themselves into their reading, so that, stupid as these quaint old stories might seem to you now-a-days, they never seemed so then. What was wanting in them the children filled up out of their own fresh hearts and fancies, and however often they read and re-read them, they always found something new. They got to know the characters in their favourite stories like real friends, and would talk them over with their companions, and compare their opinions about them in a way that made each book as good, or better, than a dozen.

So there is something to be said for this part of the 'ancien régime'—if you do not understand what that means, you will some day—after all!

The volume that Cecil Desart brought into the nursery was called 'Faults Corrected; or,' (there was always long ago an "or" in the titles of books) 'Beneficent Influences.'

"Some of the stories are stupid," said Cecil, as she sat down. "Miss Barclay said it was her mother's when she was a little girl, so it must be rather ancient; but I think I've found one that will amuse you, and that Carrots can understand."

"What's it called?" said Floss, peering over her sister's shoulder. "'Faults Corrected; or, Ben—ben—' what word's that, Cecil?"

"Sit *down*, Floss, and be quiet, or I won't read to you," said Cecil, emphatically. "That's the name of the whole book you are looking at, and you wouldn't understand the word if I told it you. The name of the story I'm going to read to you is, 'The Bewitched Tongue; or, Think before you Speak. A Fairy Tale.'"

Floss would have liked to clap her hands, but she

"Now, be quiet all of you, I'm going to begin."

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was afraid of another snub from Cecil, so she restrained her feelings.

"When there come very long words," continued Cecil—"there often are in old books—I'll change them to easy ones, so that Carrots may understand. Now, be quiet all of you, I'm going to begin. 'The Bewitched Tongue, etc.' I'm not going to read all the title again. 'In a beautiful mansion' (that just means a fine house, Carrots) 'surrounded by pleasure grounds of great extent, there lived, many years ago, a young girl named Elizabetha. She was of charming appearance and pleasing manners; her parents loved her devotedly, her brothers and sisters looked upon her with amiable affection, her teachers found her docile and intelligent. Yet Elizabetha constantly found herself, despite their affection, shunned and feared by her best and nearest friends, and absolutely disliked by those who did not know her well enough to feel assured of the real goodness of her heart.

"This sad state of things was all owing to one

unfortunate habit. She had a hasty tongue. Whatever thought was uppermost in her mind at the moment, she expressed without reflection; she never remembered the wholesome adage, "Think before you speak," or that other excellent saying, "Second thoughts are best."

'Her disposition was far from unamiable or malicious, yet the mischief of which she was the cause was indescribable. Every servant in the household dreaded to hear the sound of her voice, for many had she involved in trouble and disgrace; and as her temper was naturally quick and impetuous, and she never attempted to check her first expressions of provocation, small and even trifling disagreements were by her foolish tongue exaggerated into lasting discord, long after all real cause of offence had passed from her mind.

'"My brother will not forgive me," she confessed one day to her mother, with many tears, "and the quarrel was only that he had broken the vase of

flowers that stands on my table. I forgave *him*—I would rather lose twenty vases than his affection—and yet he will not speak to me, and passes me by with indignant looks."

'"And did you at once express your forgiveness to him, Elizabetha?" said her mother. "When you first discovered the accident, what words escaped you?"

'Elizabetha reflected, and presently her colour rose.

'"I fear, ma'am," she said, "I fear that at the first sight of the broken vase I spoke unguardedly. I exclaimed that without doubt Adolphus had thrown down the ornament on purpose to annoy me, and that I wished so mean-spirited a youth were not my brother. My little sister Celia was beside me at the time—can she have carried to him what I said? I did not really mean that; my words were but the momentary expression of my vexation."

'Her mother gravely shook her head.

'"It is your own doing altogether, Elizabetha," she said, "and you cannot complain that your brother resents so unkind and untrue a charge."

'Elizabetha burst into tears, but the harm was done, and it was some time before Adolphus could forget the pain of her unjust and hasty words.

'Another day her little brother Jacky had just with great pains and care written out his task for the next morning, when, having been called to supper, he found on his return to the schoolroom his exercise book all blotted and disfigured.

'"Who can have done this?" he cried in distress.

'Elizabetha was just entering the room.

'"Oh," she exclaimed, "it is Sukey, the under-housemaid, that you have to thank for that. I saw her coming out of the room, and she had no reason to enter it. Out of curiosity she has been looking at your books, and blotted your exercise."

'Jacky was but eight years old, full young for prudence or reflection. Downstairs he flies, his

face inflamed with anger, and meeting the unfortunate Sukey at the door of the servants' hall, upbraids her in no gentle terms for her impertinence. In vain the poor girl defends herself, and denies Master Jacky's accusation; the other servants come to the rescue, and the whole household is in an uproar, till suddenly Miss Elizabetha is named as the source of the mischief.

'"Ah," says the old housekeeper, "do not distress yourself, Sukey; we all know what Miss Elizabetha's tongue is!"

'And thereupon the poor girl is freed from blame. She had only gone to the schoolroom by the desire of an upper servant to mend the fire, and the real offender was discovered to have been the cat!

'This affair coming to the ears of Elizabetha's father, he reproved her with great severity. Mortified and chagrined, she, as usual, wept bitterly, and ashamed to meet the cold looks of the household, she hastened out into the garden and paced up and

down a shady walk, where she imagined herself quite hidden from observation.'"

"Cis," interrupted Carrots at this point, "I don't understand the story."

"I'm very sorry," said Cecil, "I didn't notice what a lot of long words there are. Shall I leave off?"

"*I* understand it," said Floss.

"Then read it for Floss, please Cis," said Carrots. "I'll be kite still."

"You're a good little boy," said Cecil; "I suppose I may as well finish it as I have begun. We're coming to the fairy part now. Perhaps you'll understand it better. Where was I? Oh yes, 'imagined herself quite hidden from observation. But in this she was mistaken, as my readers will see.

'She walked slowly up and down. "Oh my tongue, my cruel tongue!" she exclaimed, "what trouble it is the cause of! How can I cure myself of my rash speech?"

'"Do you in all sincerity wish to cure yourself, Elizabetha?" said a voice beside her; and turning in surprise at its sound, the young girl perceived at a few steps' distance a fair and sweet looking lady, clad in silvery-white, adorned with wreaths of the loveliest flowers.

'"Assuredly I do, gracious lady," replied Elizabetha, mastering as well as she was able her surprise, for she felt that this beautiful lady must be a fairy of high degree.

'"Then *I* will help you," said the lady, "but on one condition, hereafter to be explained. You are content to agree to this beforehand?"

'"To *anything*, kind fairy," replied the young girl, "if only my unhappy fault can be cured."

'The fairy smiled. "Hasty as ever," she murmured; "however, in *this* instance, you shall have no reason to regret your words. Put out your tongue, Elizabetha."

'Trembling slightly, the young girl obeyed. But

her fears were uncalled for—the fairy merely touched the unruly member with her wand and whispered some words, the meaning of which Elizabetha could not understand.

'"Meet me here one week hence," said the fairy, "till then your tongue will obey *my* commands. And if you then feel you have reason to feel grateful to me, I will call upon you to redeem your promise."

'And before Elizabetha could reply, the lady had disappeared.

'Full of eagerness and curiosity, Elizabetha returned to the house. It was growing dusk, and as she sped along the garden paths something ran suddenly against her, causing her to trip and fall. As she got up she perceived that it was Fido, the dog of her brother Adolphus. The creature came bounding up to her again, full of play and affection. But in her fall Elizabetha had bruised herself she felt angry and indignant.

'"Get off with you, you clumsy wretch," she exclaimed, or meant to exclaim. But to her amazement the words that issued from her mouth were quite otherwise.

'"Gently, gently, my poor Fido. Thou didst not mean to knock me down, however," she said in a kind and caressing tone, which the dog at once obeyed.

'Hardly knowing whether she were awake or dreaming, Elizabetha entered the house. She was met by her sister Maria.

'"Where have you been, Elizabetha?" she inquired. "Your friends the Misses Larkyn have been here, but no one could find you, so they have gone."

'Elizabetha felt extremely annoyed. She had not seen her friends for some weeks, and had much wished for a visit from them.

'"I think it was most ill-natured of none of you to look for me in the garden. You might have known I was there if you had cared to oblige me,"

were the words she intended to say, but instead of which were heard the following:

'"I thank you, my dear Maria. I am sorry to have missed my friends, but it cannot be helped."

'And when Maria, pleased by her gentleness, went on to tell her, that knowing that her disappointment would be great, and as the Misses Larkyn had been too pressed for time to linger, she had arranged to walk with Elizabetha the following day to see them, how rejoiced was Elizabetha that her intended words of unkindness had not been uttered! "Kind fairy, I thank thee!" she whispered to herself.

'The following day the same state of things continued. Many times before its close did Elizabetha's hasty temper endeavour to express itself in rash speech, but each time the tongue remained faithful to its new mistress. Whenever Elizabetha attempted to speak hastily, the words that issued from her lips were exactly the opposite of those she had

intended to utter; and as her real disposition was amiable and good, not once did she regret the metamorphosis.

'Her parents, her brothers and sisters, and even the servants of the family, were amazed and delighted at the change.

'"Go on as thou hast begun, my child," said her father, on the morning of the day on which Elizabetha was again to meet the fairy, "and soon the name of Elizabetha will be associated with gentleness and discretion in speech as in deed."

'Elizabetha blushed. She would have liked to confess that the credit of the improvement was not her own; but a moment's reflection reminded her that she had not received permission to divulge the secret, and kissing affectionately her father's hand, she thanked him for his encouragement.

'At the appointed hour she was on the spot, awaiting the fairy, who soon appeared. A benignant smile overspread her features.

'"Well, Elizabetha," she said, "and hast thou found that I have deserved thy gratitude?"

'"Kind fairy," cried the young girl, "I cannot thank thee enough. Ask of me what thou wilt, I shall be only too ready to perform it."

'The fairy smiled. "My condition is a very simple one," she said. "It is only this. Whenever, Elizabetha, you feel yourself in the least degree discomposed or out of temper, utter no word till you have mentally counted the magic number seven. And if you follow this rule, it will be but seldom that your tongue, of which I now restore to you the full control" (she touched it again with her wand as she spoke) "will lead you into trouble. Your disposition, though generous, is naturally hasty and impulsive, and till by a long course of self-restraint you have acquired complete mastery over yourself, you will find that I was right in my experiment of obliging your tongue to utter the exact opposite of what you, in your first haste, would have expressed."

'And before Elizabetha could reply, she had disappeared.

'But Elizabetha kept her promise, and to thus following her fairy friend's advice she owes it that she is now the object of universal esteem and affection, instead of being hated, despised, and feared as the owner of "a hasty tongue."'"

Cecil stopped.

"Is that all?" said Carrots.

"Yes, that's all. Did you like it?"

"I did understand better about the fairy," Carrots replied. "I think she was a werry good fairy; don't you, Floss?"

"*Very*," said Floss. "I think," she went on, "whenever I am cross, I shall *fancy* my tongue is bewitched, just to see if it would be best to say the opposite of what I was going to say. Wouldn't it be fun?"

"Better than fun, perhaps, Miss Flossie," said nurse. "I think it would be a very good thing

if big people, too, were sometimes to follow the fairy's rule."

"People as big as you, nursie?" asked Carrots.

"Oh yes, my dear," said nurse. "It's a lesson we're all slow to learn, and many haven't learnt it by the end of their threescore years and ten—'to be slow to anger,' and to keep our tongues from evil."

"*That's* out of the Bible, nursie, all of it," said Floss, as if not altogether sure that she approved of the quotation.

Cecil laughed.

"What are you laughing at, Cis?" said Floss. "It *is* out of the Bible."

"Well, no one said it wasn't," said Cecil.

"Cis," said Carrots, "will you read us another story, another day?"

"If I can find one that you can understand," said Cecil.

"Never mind if I can't," replied Carrots. "I like

to hear you reading, even if I can't understand. I like your voice. I *think*," he added after a pause, "I *think*, Cis, I'll marry you too, when I'm big. You and Floss, and nurse."

So Cecil had good reason to feel that she was greatly appreciated in the nursery.

CHAPTER IX.

SYBIL.

"The children crowned themselves with wishes,
And every wish came true."

Crowns for Children.

But it is not always, or even often, that wishes "come true," is it children? Or if they do come true, it is in a different way; so different that they hardly seem the same. Like the little old woman in the ballad, who turned herself about and wondered and puzzled, but couldn't make out if she was herself or not, we stare at our fulfilled wishes and examine them on every side, but in their altered dress—*so* different from, and, very seldom, if ever, as pretty as that which they wore in our imagination—we cannot believe that they are themselves!

Do you remember the fancies that Carrots and Floss used to have about their cousin Sybil, and how they wished for her to come to see them? Well, about a fortnight after the affair of the lost half-sovereign, Sybil actually *did* come to see them! She and her mamma. But it all happened quite differently from the way the children had planned it, so that just at first they could hardly believe it *was* "a wish come true," though afterwards, when it was over, and they began to look back to it as a real thing instead of forwards to it as a fancy, they grew to think it had really turned out nicer than any of their fancies.

You would like to hear all about it, I dare say.

It took them all by surprise—this sudden visit of Sybil and her mother, I mean. There was no time for planning or arranging anything. There just came a telegram one afternoon, to say that Mrs. ——, no, I don't think I will tell you the name of Sybil's mother, I want you just to think

of her as "auntie"—and her little girl would arrive at Sandyshore, late that same evening, "to stay one day," said the telegram, on their way to some other place, it does not matter where.

It was several years since Captain Desart had seen his sister—that is, "auntie." He had been abroad at the time of her marriage, for she was a good many years younger than he, and since then, *she* and her husband had been a great deal out of England. But now at last they were going to have a settled home, and though it was a good way from Sandyshore, still it was not like being in another country.

"I am sorry Florence can only stay one day," said Mrs. Desart to her husband; "it seems hardly worth while for her to come so far out of her way for so short a time."

"I am sorry too," said Captain Desart; "but a day's better than nothing."

Floss and Carrots were sorry *too*—but what they

were *most* sorry for was not that Sybil and her mamma were only going to stay there one day, it was that they would not arrive till after the children's bedtime! So much after, that there could not even be a question of their "sitting up till they come." There was even a doubt of Cecil and Louise doing so, and Floss could not help feeling rather pleased at Mott's getting a decided snub from his father when he broached the subject on his own account.

"Sit up till after ten o'clock—nonsense. Nobody wants you. Go to bed as usual, of course," said Captain Desart.

"How tired that poor little girl will be!" said Mrs. Desart pityingly. "Children, you must all be quiet in the morning so as not to wake her early. And you must be very gentle and kind to her, for you know she is not accustomed to companions."

"Yes, mamma," said Floss and Carrots promptly.

Mott said nothing, for, *of course*, the speech could not have been addressed to *him*. Mr. Maurice Desart, nearly thirteen years old, could not be supposed to be a companion to a mite of a girl of six.

"It won't be difficult to be quiet to-morrow morning," said Floss to Carrots, "for I expect I shall be very sleepy, as I have *quite* made up my mind to stay awake to-night, till I hear them come."

It was then eight o'clock, and Floss was going to bed. Carrots had been in bed nearly an hour, but was not yet asleep. He soon dropped off, however, and how long do you think Floss kept awake? Till twenty-three minutes past eight, or not so late probably, for that was the time by the nursery clock, when nurse came in to see that her charges were tucked up for the night, and found them both fast asleep!

They were in a state of great expectation the

next morning when they were being dressed, but they remembered their promise and were very quiet.

"When shall we see Sybil?" asked Carrots; "will she have breakfast in the nursery?"

"Of course not," said Floss, "she won't be up for ever so long, I dare say."

"Poor little thing, she must be very tired," said nurse.

"Did you see her last night?" asked Floss eagerly.

Nurse shook her head. "It was past ten when they arrived," she said, "the little lady was put to bed at once, your mamma and sisters only saw her for a minute."

So Floss and Carrots ate their bread and milk in undiminished curiosity. Not long afterwards the bell rang for prayers in the dining-room as usual, and the two, hand in hand, went in to take their places among the others.

They were rather late, Captain Desart had the

Prayer Book and Bible open before him, and was looking impatient, so Floss and Carrots sat down on their little chairs and left "good mornings" till after prayers. There was a strange lady beside their mother, and, yes, beside the strange lady a strange little girl! Was *that* Sybil? Where was the fair-haired, blue-eyed, waxen, doll-like Sybil, they had expected to see?

What they did see was worth looking at, however. It was a very pretty Sybil after all. Small and dark, dark-eyed, dark-haired, and browny-red as to complexion, Sybil was more like a gipsy than an angel as they had fancied her. She had *very* pretty, very bright, noticing eyes, and she was pretty altogether. She was dressed in black velvet with a bright crimson sash, and her hair was tied with crimson ribbon; her neat little legs were clothed in black silk stockings, and there were buckles on her tiny shoes.

Floss and Carrots hardly dared to stare at her

for her eyes seemed to be noticing them all over, and when prayers were finished, and their mamma called them to come to speak to their aunt and cousin, do you know they actually both felt quite shy of Sybil, small as she was? More shy of her than of their aunt, somehow; *she* seemed more like what they had expected, or, perhaps, the truth was, they had "expected" much less about her. Besides no children ever were shy with auntie, such a thing would have been impossible.

They kissed Sybil, Floss feeling very tall and lanky beside her compact tiny cousin, and Carrots feeling I don't know how. He just looked at Sybil with his soft wondering brown eyes, in such a solemn way that at last she burst out laughing.

"What a funny boy you are!" she exclaimed. "Mother dear, *isn't* he a funny boy?"

"Aren't you very tired, Sybil?" said Floss, afraid that she would be laughed at as "a funny girl," next.

"No, thank you," said Sybil, quite grave, and

like a grown-up person, all in a minute. "I'm becustomed to travelling. I'm not tired at all, but I'll tell you what I am—I'm," and out broke her merry laugh again, "I'm very *hungry*."

"That's a broad hint," said Captain Desart, laughing too. "Florence, your daughter is ready for breakfast, do your hear? Where will you sit, Miss Sybil? Beside your old uncle, eh?"

"Yes, thank you," replied Sybil, "if you won't call me Miss Sybil, please. And may this little boy sit 'aside me?"

"This little boy and this little girl have had their breakfast," said Mrs. Desart. "Run off, Carrots and Floss, you are both to have a whole holiday you know, so Sybil will see plenty of you."

"I wish they could see more of each other," said auntie, as the children left the room. "Some time you must let them both come and pay us a long visit, when we are really settled you know."

Auntie gave a little sigh as she said this—she

felt so tender and kind to Carrots and Floss, and something made her a little sorry for them. Though they were healthy, happy-looking children, and their dress was neat and cared for, they did not look like her Sybil, whose clothes were always like those of a little princess. Floss's frock was rather faded-looking, and there was a mark where it had been let down, and Carrots' brown holland blouse had arrived at a very *whitey*-brown shade, through much wear and washing.

"It must be hard work with so many children, and such small means," she thought to herself, for auntie had been married young to a rich man, and knew little of "making both ends meet," but aloud she only said, "how lovely little Fabian would look in black velvet, Lucy! What a complexion he has!"

"Yes, if you can forgive him his hair," said Mrs. Desart.

"I think his hair is beautiful," observed Sybil and then went on eating her breakfast.

They all laughed, but there was still a little sigh at the bottom of auntie's heart. There was reason for it greater than the sight of her little nephew's and niece's shabby clothes.

But there was no sigh in the hearts of Floss and Carrots.

"Carrots," said Floss, as they made their way to the nursery to decide which of their small collection of toys were fit for Sybil's inspection, "Carrots, *did* you hear."

"What auntie said?" asked Carrots. "Yes, I heard. Do you think mamma will ever let us go?"

"Some day, perhaps," said Floss, and oh what dreams and plans and fancies hung on that "perhaps!" "*Fancy*, Carrots, we should go in the railway, you and me, Carrots, alone perhaps."

"Oh, Floss!" said Carrots, his feelings being beyond further expression.

That "some day" was a good way off, however,

but "to-day" was here, and a nice bright-looking to-day it was. How happy they were! How happy Sybil was!

For, somehow, though she was dressed like a princess, though since babyhood she had had *everything* a child could wish for, though very often, I must confess, she had had "her own way," a good deal more than would have been good for most children, little Sybil was not spoilt. The spoiling dropped off her like water down a duck's back, and auntie never found out it had been there at all! Perhaps after all there is a kind of spoiling that isn't spoiling—love and kindness, and even indulgence, do not spoil when there is perfect trust and openness, and when a child at the same time is taught the one great lesson, that the best happiness is trying to make others happy too.

They played on the sands nearly all day and Sybil, to her great delight, was covered up from damage by one of Carrots' blouses. The sun came

out bright and warm, and they built the most lovely sand house you ever saw.

"I'd like to live in it always," said Carrots.

"Oh you funny boy," said Sybil patronisingly, "and what would you do at night, when it got cold, and perhaps the sea would come in."

"Perhaps the mermaids would take care of him till the morning," said Floss.

"What are the mermaids?" asked Sybil.

"Pretty ladies," said Carrots, "who live at the bottom of the sea, only they've got tails."

"Then they can't be pretty," said Sybil decidedly, "not unless their tails are beautiful and sweeping out, like peacocks! Are they?—one day I tied a shawl of mother's on, it was a red and gold shawl, and I sweeped it about just like a peacock,—that *would* be pretty."

"I don't think mermaids' tails are like that," said Carrots, doubtfully, "but they *are* pretty ladies, aren't they Floss?"

"Beautiful," said Floss, "but they're very sad.

They come up to the shore at night and comb their hair and cry dreadfully."

"What do they cry for?" asked Sybil and Carrots, pressing up to Floss, and forgetting all about the lovely sand house.

"Because they—no, you couldn't understand," she broke off; "it is no good telling you."

"Oh do tell," said the children.

"Well," said Floss, "I read in a book of Cecil's, they cry because they haven't got any souls. When they die they can't go to heaven, you see."

Sybil and Carrots looked very solemn at this. Then a sudden thought struck Carrots.

"How can they cry if they haven't got souls, Floss?" he said, "nurse says it's our souls that make us glad and sorry. Are you *sure* the poor mermaids haven't got souls?"

"I'm only telling you what I read in a book," said Floss. "I dare say it's all a sort of fairy tale. Don't you like fairy tales, Sybil?"

"No," said Sybil, "I like stories of naughty boys and girls best — *very* naughty boys and girls."

"Oh, Sybil!" said Carrots, "*I* don't, because they are always unhappy in the end."

"No, they're not. Sometimes they all get good. Mother always makes them get good at the end," replied Sybil.

"Does auntie tell you stories?" said Floss.

"Yes, of course, for I can't read them to myself yet. I'm learning, but it is *so* hard," said Sybil dolefully.

"I wish auntie would tell *us* stories."

"P'raps she will when you come to my house," said Sybil, encouragingly. "Would you think that a treat?"

"It would be a 'normous treat."

"We're going to have a treat to-day," said Floss. "We're going to have tea in the dining-room with you, Sybil, and auntie and everybody, and I think

it's time to go in now, because we must change our frocks."

Carrots had never had tea in the dining-room before, and felt a little overpowered by the honour. He sat very still, and took whatever was offered to him, as nurse had taught him. Cecil poured out the tea, and to please the children she put an extra allowance of sugar into their cups. Carrots tasted his, and was just thinking how very nice it was, when it flashed across his mind that he should not have had any sugar. He put down his cup and looked round him in great perplexity. If only he could ask Floss. But Floss was at the other side of the table, she seemed to be drinking her tea without any misgiving. Wasn't it naughty? Could she have forgotten? Carrots grew more and more unhappy; the tears filled his eyes, and his face got scarlet.

"What's the matter, dear?" said auntie, who was sitting next him, "is your tea too hot? Has it scalded your poor little mouth?"

She said it in a low voice. She was so kind and "understanding," she knew Carrots would not have liked everybody round the table to begin noticing him, and as she looked at him more closely, she saw that the tears in his eyes were those of distress, not of "scalding."

"No, thank you," said Carrots, looking up in auntie's face in his perplexity; "it isn't that. My tea is *werry* good, but it's got sugar in."

"And you don't like sugar? Poor old man! Never mind, Cecil will give you another cup. You're not like Sybil in your tastes," said auntie, kindly, and she turned to ask Cecil for some sugarless tea for her little brother.

"No, no, auntie. Oh, *please* don't," whispered Carrots, his trouble increasing, and pulling hard at his aunt's sleeve as he spoke, "I *do* like sugar werry much—it isn't that. But mamma said I was never, *never* to take nucken that wasn't mine, and sugar won't be mine for two weeks more, nurse says."

Auntie stared at her little nephew in blank bewilderment. What *did* he mean? Even her quick wits were quite at fault.

"What *do* you mean, my dear little boy?" she said.

Suddenly a new complication struck poor Carrots.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "it's a secret, it's a secret, and I'm telling it," and he burst into tears.

It was impossible now to hide his trouble. Everybody began to cross-question him.

"Cry-baby," muttered Maurice, and even Mrs. Desart said, "Carrots, I wonder at your behaving so when your aunt and cousin are here. Floss, do you know what is the matter with him?"

"No, mamma," said Floss, looking as she always did when Carrots was in distress, ready to cry herself.

"Carrots," said Captain Desart, sharply, "go to the nursery till you learn to behave properly."

Carrots got slowly down off his high chair, and

crept away. But everybody looked troubled and uncomfortable.

Auntie hated to see people looking troubled and uncomfortable. She thought a minute, and then she turned to Mrs. Desart.

"Lucy," she said, "will you let me try what I can do with the poor little fellow? I am sure it was not naughtiness made him cry."

And almost before Mrs. Desart could reply, auntie was off to the nursery in search of Carrots.

He had left off crying, and was sitting quietly by the window, looking out at his old friend the sea.

"What are you thinking about, my poor old man?" said auntie, fondly.

Carrots looked up at her. "I like you to call me that," he said. "I was thinking about our hoops and what a long time four weeks is."

"Has that to do with you having no sugar?" asked auntie.

"What are you thinking about, my poor old man?" said auntie, fondly.

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"Yes," said Carrots. "How *did* you guess? You're like a fairy, auntie." But then his face grew troubled again. "I forgot," he went on, "it's a secret. It's Floss's secret too. I would so like to tell you, for I don't know what to do. I don't mind having no tea, but they all thought I was naughty."

"Wait a minute," said auntie. She hurried out of the room, but was back in a minute.

"I've asked Floss," she said, "and she gives you leave to tell me. So now, perhaps, when I know all about it, I can tell you what to do."

The telling did not take Carrots long; he was so glad to show auntie he had not meant to be naughty. Auntie listened quite gravely, and when he had finished she said she thought he was quite right not to take any sugar.

"But do you think Floss did?" said Carrots, anxiously.

"Perhaps having tea in the dining-room made

her forget," said auntie. "We'll ask her afterwards, and if she did forget, I'll tell you what she must do. She must go without one day longer than you. Now come along with me, and I'll make it all right, you'll see."

When they got back to the dining-room auntie quietly lifted Carrots on to his chair again, and said to his mamma with a smile, "It was all a mistake; I thought it was; Carrots was not naughty at all, and he is quite happy again now."

And Mrs. Desart smiled too, so Carrots really did feel happy again. But he wondered what auntie would do about the tea, which was still standing there as he had left it, and it would be wrong to "waste" it, thought Carrots.

Sybil was sitting on auntie's other side, and auntie glancing at her cup saw that it was empty. So auntie quietly put Carrots' cup before Sybil and gave Carrots the empty one.

"Cecil," she said, "will you give Carrots some tea without any sugar?"

Cecil saw that auntie had some reason for asking this, so she gave Carrots the tea as auntie said, and Carrots drank it and ate his bread and butter and a piece of cake, with great content.

The only person who did not seem *quite* contented was Sybil.

"Mother," she whispered, "I don't like having Carrots' tea. It's quite cold."

But as Carrots didn't hear it, it didn't much matter. For you see, Sybil had had one cup of nice hot tea, so she was not so badly off after all.

And, alas! the very next morning auntie and Sybil had to go away. And the long-talked of and fancied-about visit was over.

CHAPTER X.

A JOURNEY AND ITS ENDING.

"The way was long, the wind was cold."

Soon after auntie's visit summer really began to come. It was very pleasant while it lasted, but this year it was a very short summer, and the winter that came after was a very severe one, and made many people ill. It did not make Carrots ill, nor Floss, nor any of the Desart children, for they were all strong, but it was very bad for their mother. As the winter went on, she seemed to get weaker and weaker; there were very few days on which she could go out, and if the spring had not been an early and very mild one, I hardly think her strength would have lasted.

But with the finer weather she seemed to get

better again. The children were of course very glad, but still they had not felt frightened by her illness. It had come on so slowly and gradually that they had got accustomed to it, as children do. They thought it was just the cold wintry weather that had made her ill, and that when the spring came she would get better. And when the spring came and she *did* get better, they were perfectly satisfied and happy.

By the end of *this* summer Carrots was seven years old—no longer in the least a baby, though he was not tall for his age. He could read, of course, perfectly, and write a little. Now and then he wrote little letters to Sybil in answer to hers, for she was very particular about getting answers. She was only just beginning to learn to write, and sometimes when she got tired of working away at real "A's" and "B's" and "C's" in her letters, she would dash off into a lot of "scribble," which she said was "children's writing," and "if Carrots didn't

know what it meant he must be very stupid, as he was a child too."

Carrots *didn't* know what it meant, but he never liked to say so, and I dare say it did not much matter. But *his* letters to Sybil were quite real. Any one could have understood them.

Long ago Floss and he had bought their hoops. They were quite "old friends" now. They had bought them at the toy-shop, just as they had planned, and, curiously enough when their mamma and nurse counted up how much was owing to them for the sugar, it came to *exactly* the price of the hoops.

But I must tell you what happened just about the time Carrots had his seventh birthday. The summer was nearly over again and already the cold winds, of which there were so many at Sandyshore, were beginning to be felt. Floss noticed that her mother very seldom went out now, and even in the house she generally had to wrap herself up in a shawl.

"Mamma, I hope the cold weather isn't going to make you ill again?" Floss said, one day when she and Carrcts came in from a race on the sands, all hot and rosy with running.

"I don't know, dear," said her mother with a little sigh.

"I wish you could run about like us. That would make you *so* hot," said Carrots.

Mrs. Desart smiled. Just then her glance happened to fall on Floss's boots. "My dear child," she said, "those boots are really not fit to go out with. There's a great hole at the side of one of them."

"I know, mamma," said Floss, "but they're going to be mended. Nurse thinks they'll do a good while longer, if they're mended. I hope they will, for I know you always have so many new things to get when winter begins to come —haven't you, mamma?"

Mrs. Desart sighed again.

"I should have liked all your things to be so nice," she said, more as if speaking to herself than to Floss, "but it can't be helped."

Something in her tone caught Floss's attention.

"Why, mamma?" she asked, "why did you want our things to be so nice?"

"Because, dears, you may be going away from home," replied Mrs. Desart.

Floss and Carrots stared with astonishment. "Going away from home," Floss repeated, utterly unable to say more. Carrots could say nothing at all, he could *only* stare.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Desart, "I had meant to tell you about it before, but I have kept putting it off—" she stopped and seemed to hesitate.

"Why, mamma?" said Floss again. "Don't you like us to go? Are you coming with us, mamma?"

"Are we going to auntie's?" said Carrots.

His asking this seemed to please his mother.

"You would like to go to auntie's, wouldn't you, Carrots?" she said.

Carrots stroked his mother's shawl up and down two or three times before he answered.

"I'd like to go if you would come too," he said at last, "but I think I would rather stay at home, thank you, if you can't come."

Mrs. Desart's eyes filled with tears. "Poor little Carrots!" she said, softly smoothing his curls with her hand. "But if it would please me for Floss and you to go without me?" she said.

"I'll go if you want me to go, mamma," said Carrots.

"I must explain a little," said Mrs. Desart, and then she went on to tell the children how it was. The doctor had said she must not risk another winter at Sandyshore, and it had been arranged for her to go to a warmer climate. Cecil and Louise were to go with her; Captain Desart

would be with them as much as he possibly could, and Maurice was to live at school. And what concerned the two little ones almost more than anything, *nurse* was to go too! "I must have some one kind and sensible with me, in case, in case—" and again Mrs. Desart hesitated.

"In case you were very tired with travelling, or if you were to get a bad cold again; somebody who could make nice white wine whey and things like that," said Floss, who was of a practical turn of mind, "oh yes, mamma, I quite understand."

"Though nurse is getting old, she has been so much accustomed to travelling, too," said Mrs. Desart, "and we are going a long way—to Algeria; Floss, do you know where that is?"

"Over the sea!" said Floss, "I wish we might come too, mamma, Carrots and I," she exclaimed. "You will be *so* far away."

"But you will be with auntie, and you know

who kind auntie is," said her mother, forcing herself to speak cheerfully. "And it is such a pretty place where auntie lives."

"Is the sea there?" said Carrots.

"No, but the hills are," answered Mrs. Desart with a smile. "I am quite sure you will like it." And she went on to tell them so much about auntie's pretty home that for a little they almost forgot everything but the pleasant part of the change that was to come so soon.

And it did come very soon. It seemed but a few days from the afternoon they had first heard about it all, when Floss and Carrots found themselves early one morning at the little railway station with their father, waiting for the train.

Captain Desart was to travel with them for the first hour, to take them to the "junction" where they were to change and get into a train which would take them straight to Whitefriars, near which was auntie's house.

You will laugh, children, I dare say, and think Floss and Carrots very countrified and ignorant when I tell you that they had never been a long railway journey before. Never, that is to say, that they could *remember*—for their parents had come to Sandyshore when Floss was a baby, and Carrots, as you know, had been born there.

So you can hardly fancy what a wonderful event this journey was to them.

Their little hearts were very full at first after parting with their mother, and sisters, and nurse, and all that made the Cove House home to them.

And their mamma had kissed them so *many* times, as if she could not really say good-bye, though she was not generally a very petting or kissing mamma, but rather quiet and grave.

And nurse had the tears in her eyes, and Louise had them pouring down her face, and Cecil had *her* face squeezed up in a sort of way that Floss

knew meant she was determined she would not cry. Floss felt troubled in a way she could not understand, and I think Carrots did too. They had a feeling that the bigger people knew of more reason for sorrow than had been told to them, and yet they could not imagine what it could be. And after all, to *them* the parting for even four or five months was almost as great a trouble as they could understand! only they were going to "auntie's!"

"And we will try to be so good, dear mamma," said Floss, bravely choking down her tears. "We will try to get on with our lessons, too, and write you nice letters. And—and—" here a sob or two *would* make its way, "I can't help crying a little; but I'm sure we shall be very happy, won't we Carrots?"

"If mamma wants us to be happy, we'll *try*, won't we Floss?" said Carrots. He wiped the tears on his mother's cheeks with his own little

pocket handkerchief and looked up in her face piteously. "Please don't cry, poor mamma," he said; "we *will* be good and happy."

Then their father came in and hurried them off, and the farewells were over—that part of them, at least, for the saying goodbye to Captain Desart at the junction was rather hard too.

And at last Floss and Carrots find themselves at the height of their ambition—alone in a railway carriage travelling to auntie's! But they do not seem so delighted as they used to fancy they would; they do not jump about and laugh and chatter in their overflowing pleasure—they sit quite still, side by side, holding each other's hands and with little quiet grave faces.

"Things never come the same as people fancy," said Floss at last. "We never thought we should go to auntie's because poor mamma was ill, did we Carrots?"

"No, we never did," said Carrots. "But mamma

will soon get better, won't she, Floss, at that nice warm place?"

"Oh yes, of course she will," said Floss. "But it's a long way away Carrots, and I never thought going to auntie's would be like this."

"No," agreed Carrots again, "we never did."

"I'm so sorry to leave them all, aren't you, Carrots?" said Floss, her voice trembling a little.

"Yes," said Carrots; "and Floss, I'm very sorry, too, to leave the sea. I never left the sea before, you know."

"But the *sea* won't miss you," said Floss, "and poor mamma and nursie and all of them *will* miss us. That's what I keep thinking of."

"When should we eat our dinner, Floss?" said Carrots, with an instinct that it would be as well to change the subject.

"Not just yet. When we've gone about half way would do; and papa said that great big place, Millingham, would be about half way."

"But if there were any other people to get into the carriage?" said Carrots.

"Well, it wouldn't matter," said Floss. "People must eat when they are travelling."

"But wouldn't we have to ask them to have some too?" suggested Carrots.

"I don't know," said Floss; "I never thought of that. Perhaps it *would* be polite. But there are only eight sandwiches, Carrots; eight sandwiches and four sponge cakes and a packet of Albert biscuits. I hope a great many people won't get in."

No one got in at the next station. Only the guard put his head in at the door, as Captain Desart had asked him to do, to see how the little pair were getting on. Carrots had thoughts of offering *him* a sandwich, but he disappeared before there was time to do so, which Floss thought very fortunate when she heard of Carrots' intention. "For you see," she said, "if we began offering

them to him, we would have to do it at every station, and if there are eight stations before Whitefriars, all our sandwiches would be gone."

"He might have a biscuit for a change," said Carrots, submissive, but scarcely convinced. "He is a nice man, Floss—he calls us 'Well, sir,' and 'Miss.' Do you think papa told him to say 'Well, sir,' and 'Miss?'"

But before Floss had time to answer they had stopped again, and this time some one did get into their carriage. The new-comer was a small, neat, oldish lady. She looked rather grim at first, but after a while she grew decidedly friendly, and no wonder; for at Millingham Floss and Carrots unpacked their little basket of provisions, and I don't think the grimmest of maiden ladies could have remained grim after the politeness with which the children treated her.

They selected the nicest looking sandwich, putting it on an Albert biscuit by way of a plate, and

then, at a sign from Floss, Carrots clambered down from his seat and gravely offered it to the lady.

"I'm sorry there's no mustard, if you like mustard," said Floss; "but Carrots and I don't like it, and—and—I suppose nurse didn't think of anyone else."

The oldish lady looked at the children for a moment before she replied.

"I am very much obliged to you," she said at last, "but I think I won't take a sandwich, as I had luncheon before I left home. But if you will allow me I will have a biscuit. I am very fond of biscuits."

"I'm so glad," said Floss, hospitably. "Now, Carrots," she said in a lower voice, "you eat two sandwiches and I'll eat two, and we'll each have one sponge cake. And that'll do for dinner. We'll eat the rest in about an hour and pretend we're having tea early."

The lady asked them a good many questions after this, and told them they were such well-behaved children, she would not mind travelling all the way to Whitefriars with them. Floss blushed a little at this; it made her feel shy to be praised to her face, but still no doubt the lady meant it kindly, and they were rather sorry when she left them, some stations before they got to Whitefriars. Their old friend the guard left them here, too, but he popped his head in for the last time to say that he was going to speak for them to "him that was coming on now." And Floss thanked him, though she had not the least idea what he meant.

But there must have been some mistake about it, for the new guard never came near them, and when, at the last stoppage before Whitefriars, another man threw the door open and demanded "tickets," Floss felt too startled by his rough manner to ask him what they were longing to

know, how far they still had to go. But he took away the tickets. "So we can't have very far to go," said Floss. "Papa said they would take away the tickets a little before we got to Whitefriars."

"Will auntie be at the station?" said Carrots.

"Yes, I'm sure she will," said Floss. "Auntie and Sybil too, perhaps. Carrots, I do believe we're there; the train's stopping."

And in another minute they found themselves in a nice clean-looking station with several people standing about on the platform, evidently waiting for the train.

The children looked out eagerly. There were two or three ladies, one little girl, and a few other people—but no auntie, no Sybil!

"P'raps this isn't the place," said Carrots.

"Please, is this Whitefriars?" inquired Floss of a porter who just then threw open the door.

"Whitefriars, yes miss. Any luggage?"

"Oh yes," said Floss anxiously, 'a great deal. It's in one of the luggage carriages, and it's marked with our name."

The man smiled. "Will you come with me, missie, and show me which it is, and I'll get it all right for you."

"Oh, thank you," said Floss, gathering together their cloaks and baskets, and preparing to descend.

"What a *kind* man," whispered Carrots; and when the porter lifted him out of the carriage he took hold of his hand and ran along beside him as fast as his little legs could keep up.

Floss felt quite bewildered at first, when she saw the heaps and heaps of luggage lying on the platform, all labelled "Whitefriars." It seemed to her that everybody must have been travelling to Whitefriars to-day! But by degrees it was claimed and melted away, and the kind porter, to whom she had already pointed out their "great

deal"—one portmanteau, one bag, and a small tin hat-box—soon picked it up and stood waiting for further orders.

"Where am I to take it to, please miss?" he said. "Is there no one here to meet you?"

"I don't think so, I don't know what to do," said Floss, looking sadly troubled again. In the excitement of finding the luggage she had forgotten this new difficulty, but now it returned in full force.

"Have you far to go?" said the man.

"Oh no," said Floss, "auntie's house is near here, I know."

"Then perhaps little master and you had better walk on, and send for the luggage afterwards?" suggested the man, never doubting from Floss's manner that the children were accustomed to the place, and knew their way.

"Yes, I suppose so," said Floss uncertainly.

"Or shall I fetch you a fly from the *Blue*

Boar?" said the man. "The station flies has all drove off."

"No, thank you; I don't think I have enough money for that," said Floss, feeling in her pocket for her purse, which she knew contained only her father's parting gift of half-a-crown, a sixpence with a hole in, and three pennies of Carrots! "Your auntie says she will get you *everything* you want, so I need not give you any money with you," their mother had said. Floss had no idea what a fly from the *Blue Boar* would cost, but it *sounded* very grand, and she hardly dared to risk it.

"Well, I daresay you'll be safest to walk," said the porter, rather afraid of getting himself into a scrape if he fetched the children a fly without proper authority, and feeling uncertain, from their very plain and rather "countrified" appearance, if their friends belonged to the fly patronising class or not. "I'll keep the luggage safe till it's

sent for—no fear," and with a friendly nod he marched of with their possessions.

Holding Carrots by the hand, Floss made her way out of the station. For about a quarter of a mile the road ran straight before them and they trudged along contentedly enough. But after awhile they came to a point where two roads met, one leading to the little watering-place (for the station was some way from the town), the other out into the country. And for the first time it struck Floss that she did not know the way. She looked about her in perplexity.

"It cannot be far," she said; "mamma always said auntie lived *near* Whitefriars. But I wish I knew which way to go."

Carrots had no suggestion to offer. To make matters worse, it began to rain—a cold, sleety, late October rain; the children had no umbrella, and were already tired and hungry. I think it

was much to their credit that they did not lose heart altogether.

Just as Floss was making up her mind to take the turn leading in the distance to terraces of houses and gardens and other signs of civilisation, there came, jogging along the road on a cart-horse, a farmer's boy. Joyful sight! Floss plucked up heart.

"Can you tell me, please," she called out, "which is the way to Greenmays?"

The farmer's boy turned his thumb in the direction of the country road. "Yonder," he shouted, without stopping in his jog, "straight on past the church, and down lane to left."

"Is it far?" asked Floss, but the boy did not seem to hear.

There was nothing for it but to go on with their trudge. The rain was not heavy but very piercingly cold, and the daylight was beginning to fade. Two or three hot tears at last forced

their way down Floss's cheeks, but she wiped them quickly away, before Carrots could see them. Carrots said nothing, but Floss knew he was getting tired by the way he kept lagging behind, every now and then giving a little run to get up to Floss again.

"I shouldn't mind so much, Floss," he said at last, "if it would be home when we get there, and if we were to find mamma and nurse and tea in our own nursery waiting for us."

This was altogether too much for Floss. For a moment or two she could not speak, she was choked with sobs. "Oh, how I do wish poor mamma hadn't got ill," she said at last.

"Poor Flossie, dear Flossie," said Carrots, pulling down her face to kiss in spite of the rain and the dark and the cold and everything. "I didn't mean to make you cry. And auntie will be very kind when we get there, won't she, Floss?"

"Oh yes," said Floss, trying to speak cheerfully, though in her secret heart there was a little misgiving. It did not look very kind not to have sent to meet them at the station, and even without this, Floss, though she had not said so, had felt a little shy and frightened at the thought of meeting auntie and the strange uncle, and even Sybil again. It was nearly two years since the visit to Sandyshore, and two years is a lifetime to a child—it seemed to Floss like going altogether among strangers. She clasped her little brother's hand tighter as these feelings passed through her mind. "It won't be so bad for Carrots," she reflected; "any way he will have me."

They seemed to have walked a very weary way when at last the church, of which the farmer's boy had spoken, came in sight—very dimly in sight, for the daylight was fast dying away. Floss would have passed the church without

noticing it, but the road divided in two just at this place, and she was obliged to think which way to go. Then the boy's directions came into her mind.

"To the left past the church, didn't he say, Carrots?" she said.

"'Down lane to left,' he said," replied Carrots.

"Then it *must* be this way," said Floss, and on they trudged.

In a few minutes they came to large gates, on one side of which stood a pretty little house; but such a little house, hardly bigger than a cottage.

"Is that auntie's house?" said Carrots.

"I'm afraid it's too little to be auntie's house,' said Floss. "I wish it was. I would *much* rather auntie lived in a cottage."

"Just like Mrs. White's," said Carrots.

Floss could not help laughing at him; it had left off raining and her spirits were rising a little.

"Look Carrots," she said, "there is a light in the cottage window. We'd better knock at the door and ask if it is auntie's house. It's getting rather like a fairy story, isn't it Carrots? Fancy if somebody calls out 'Pull the string and the latch will open.'"

"But that would be the wolf, Floss," said Carrots, pressing closer to his sister.

It was no wolf, but a nice, tidy-looking woman with a white cap and a baby in her arms who opened the door, and stood staring at the two little wayfarers in bewilderment. Floss grew afraid that she was angry.

"I'm very sorry—I mean I beg your pardon," she began. "I didn't know this was your house. We thought perhaps it was auntie's. Can you tell me, please, where Greenmays is?"

"This *is* Greenmays," said the woman. Floss stared: the door opened right into the kitchen, it couldn't be auntie's house.

"This is the lodge," continued the woman. "If it's someone at the big house you're wanting, you must just go straight up the drive. I'd show you the way," she went on, "but my husband's up at the stables and it's too cold for baby. You seem wet and tired, you do—have you come far?"

"Yes," said Floss, wearily, "*very* far. We thought auntie would meet us at the station, but there wasn't anybody."

"They must be kin to the housekeeper, surely," thought the woman. And yet something indescribable in Floss's manner, and in the clear, well-bred tones of her small, childish voice, prevented her asking if this was so. "I wish I could go with you to the house," she repeated, curiosity and kindliness alike prompting her, "but," she added, 'ooking doubtfully at the sleeping child in her arms, "I'm afeared for baby."

"Oh, it doesn't matter, thank you," said Floss,

"we can find the way, I daresay. Good evening," and taking Carrots by the hand, she turned to go.

"Good evening," said little Carrots also.

"Good evening, and I hope you'll find your auntie in," said the woman. And for a few minutes she stood at the door straining her eyes after the two forlorn little figures till she could distinguish them no longer in the darkness of the trees bordering the avenue. "Who can they be?" she said to herself. "Such a pretty spoken, old-fashioned little pair I never did see!"

CHAPTER XI.

HAPPY AND SAD.

"'Tis gone—and in a merry fit
They run upstairs in gamesome race.
* * * * * *
A moment's heaviness they feel,
A sadness at the heart."

The Mother's Return.

It was very dark in the drive and Carrots crept close to Floss. But Floss felt far less afraid of the dark than of the light! when at last the house came in view and the brightly lit up windows shone out into the gloom.

"Oh, what a big house," said Floss. "Oh Carrots, how I do wish that little cottage had been auntie's house, even though the door did open right into the kitchen. Don't you Carrots?"

"I don't know," replied Carrots, "auntie will be very kind to us, won't she, Floss?"

"Oh yes," said Floss, "but supposing she is having a party to-night, Carrots?"

"Well, we could have tea in the nursery, and go to bed," said Carrots philosophically. "Oh Floss, *wouldn't* you like some nice hot tea and bread and butter?"

"Poor Carrots," said Floss. And her anxiety to see her little brother in comfort again gave her courage to ring the bell as loudly as she could.

A manservant opened the door. Very tall and formidable he looked to the two children, whose eyes were dazzled by the sudden light, after their long walk in the dusk.

"If you please," said Floss, "is auntie at home."

The man stared. "*What* did you say?" he inquired. "Is it a message from some one?"

"Oh no," said Floss, "it's just that we've come

Carrots and I—will you please tell auntie? We've walked all the way from the station, because there was no one to meet us."

The man still stared. He had heard something about a young lady and gentleman, his mistress's nephew and niece, being expected on a visit, but his ideas were rather slow. He could not all at once take in that the dilapidated little couple before him could possibly be the looked for guests.

But just then another person came upon the scene. A little figure with bright dark eyes and flying hair came dancing into the hall.

"Who's there, Fletcher?" she said. "Is it the post?"

"No miss," said Fletcher, rather glad of some one to consult in his perplexity. "I don't know who it is—that's to say, it's a little boy and girl who say as they've come from the station, but I can't justly make out who it is they want.

"How funny," said Sybil, coming forward and peering out from under Fletcher's arm, "perhaps they'll tell *me* what they want. Who are you, little girl? Is it my mother you want? Will you give me your message?"

She looked more like a little princess than ever. She was dressed to go down to the drawing-room before dinner—all white embroidery and lace and rose-coloured ribbons. Floss and Carrots looked at her with a sort of dazzled admiration, mingled with shy bewilderment. It all seemed more of a mistake than ever—Sybil was evidently not expecting them—if only the railway station had not been so dreadfully far away, Floss felt as if she would have liked to take Carrots by the hand and go away back again, all the long weary way to Sandyshore!

But *Carrots'* faith in auntie and Sybil was unshaken—and his childlike confidence less susceptible of chill. Partly from mortification, partly to hide

that she was crying, Floss stood perfectly silent, but Carrots pressed forward.

"It is Flossie and me, Sybil—don't you remember us? We've walked *such* a long way, and there was nobody to meet us at the station, and we are *so* cold and so hungry!"

Sybil gave a sort of leap into the air. "Floss and Carrots!" she cried, "oh mother, mother come quick, here are Floss and Carrots!"

She seemed to fly across the hall in one second, and darting down a passage disappeared, crying out all the way, "Flossie and Carrots—oh mother, mother, come."

And before the children had time to consider what they had best do, and *long* before the very deliberate Mr. Fletcher had collected his wits sufficiently to decide upon inviting them to come in, Sybil was back again, closely followed by her mother, whom she had dragged out of the drawing-room without any other explanation than her cry

"It is Flossie and me, Sybil—don't you remember us?"

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of "Floss and Carrots, oh mother, Flossie and Carrots."

And when Floss saw auntie running to them, with her kind face all eagerness and anxiety, the shyness and the disappointment and the mortification all seemed suddenly to melt away. She rushed into the hall and threw herself sobbing into auntie's arms. "Oh auntie," she cried, "we are so tired—poor Carrots is I mean, and so hungry, and I thought you had forgotten us, and we're so far away from mamma."

Auntie understood all about it in a moment. She hugged Floss tight, and only let go of her for an instant to get hold of Carrots and hug him tight too. And then, when she saw the two tired little white faces, and felt how wet they were, and saw the tears on Floss's cheeks, she sat down on the hall floor, still clasping them tight, and actually cried too.

"My two poor dear little babes in the wood,"

she exclaimed. "What a dreadful mistake! What a cruel auntie you must have thought me!"

"I didn't know if you wanted us—I thought perhaps you had forgotten about us coming," whispered Floss.

"No wonder," said auntie; "but Flossie, darling, I haven't got any letter to say what day you were coming? That was why we were not at the station. Sybil and I had been making such delightful plans about how we should meet you at the station—do you think your father and mother could have forgotten to write to tell me the day?"

"Oh no," said Floss, "I know papa wrote to tell you—he wrote the day before yesterday, for I heard him tell mamma so. And this morning when the post came, just as we were leaving, he wondered a little that there was no letter from you, but he said perhaps you hadn't thought it

worth while to write, as you had said any day this week would do for us to come."

"Of course I would have written," said auntie; "but what can have become of the letter?"

It had evidently gone astray somehow, and that very evening the mystery was explained, for the postman brought it—a very travel-worn letter indeed, with two or three scrawls across it in red ink—"Missent to Whitehurst," "Try Whitefield," etc., etc.

"Whenever a letter does go wrong, which certainly is not very often, it is sure to be one of consequence," said auntie. But long before the letter came Floss and Carrots had forgotten their troubles—at least if they hadn't it was not auntie's fault, for I can't tell you how kind she was and what a fuss she made about them. She took them up to Sybil's nice beautiful warm nursery and all their wet things were taken off, and Floss was wrapped up in a dressing-gown of

auntie's and Carrots in one of Sybil's, and then they had the most *lovely* tea you can imagine.

Sybil's father was away that night and was not coming back till the next day, and auntie was to have dinner alone, with Sybil beside her, you may be sure, to "keep her company," and help her to get through dinner by opening her little mouth for "tastes" every now and then. But auntie had to manage alone, after all, for of course Sybil would not leave Floss and Carrots, and auntie sent up the very nicest things from the dining-table for the children to eat with their tea, and Sybil did get some "tastes," I can assure you.

And they laughed at each other in the dressing gowns, and Floss quite forgot that she had expected to feel shy and strange. Only when auntie came up to the nursery again after dinner and made Floss tell her all about the long walk in the cold and the dark, and about the "kind por-

ter," and the oldish-looking lady, and, further back still, about the leaving home in the morning and how poor mamma kissed them "so many, many times"—Floss could not help crying again a little, nor could auntie either. And though Carrots and Sybil did not cry, their little faces looked very solemn and as if they almost thought they *should* cry, as they sat side by side on the rug in front of the high nursery guard, Carrots in the funny red-flannel dressing-gown which made him look *so* "old fashioned," and Sybil in her white embroidery and rose ribbons, crumpling them all up "anyhow" in a way which really went to Floss's heart, though auntie did not seem to mind.

Then came bed-time. Such a nice bed-time, for auntie had prepared for them two dear little rooms, with a door between, that they should not feel far away from each other. And though it was the very first time in Carrots' life that he had gone to bed without kind old nurse to tuck

him up, he did not feel unhappy, for Floss reminded him what a good thing it was that their mother had nurse with her now she was ill, and besides, Sybil's French maid Denise was *very* kind and merry, and not at all "stuck up" or grand.

And the waking the next morning!

Who does not know those first wakings in a strange place! Sometimes so pleasant, sometimes *so* sad, but never, I think, without a strange interestingness of their own. This waking was pleasant, though so strange. The sun was shining for one thing—a great thing, I think I should call it, and the children felt it to be so.

They woke about the same time and called out to each other, and then Floss got out of bed and went to see how Carrots was looking, after all his adventures.

"You haven't caught cold I hope, Carrots," she said in a motherly tone.

"Oh no. I'm *quite* well," replied Carrots, "I haven't even a cold in my nose. And isn't it a nice morning, Floss, and isn't this a *lovely* room?"

"Yes," said Floss, "and so is mine, Carrots."

"And auntie *is* kind, isn't she, Floss?"

"Oh, *very*," said Floss.

"Isn't it nice to see the sun?" said Carrots. "Floss, I can't understand how it can always be the same sun, however far we go."

"But don't you remember what I showed you," said Floss, "about the world being like a little ball, always going round and round a great light, so *of course* the great light must always be the same?"

"Yes," said Carrots dreamily, "but still it seems funny. Will mamma see the sun at that nice warm place over the sea?"

"Why of course," said Floss, "it's the sun that makes that place nice and warm."

"*Is* it?" said Carrots. "Is that place nearer the sun than Sandyshore is, Floss?"

"No, not exactly. At least it is in a sort of a way—the sunshine falls straighter on it, but I couldn't explain without a globe and a lot of fuss,' said Floss. "Never mind just now, Carrots—perhaps auntie can show you."

"But Floss," persisted Carrots, "I do want to know one thing. Shall we see the sun in heaven?"

"No," said Floss decidedly, "*certainly* not. It says in the Bible there will be no sun or moon in heaven."

"Then I don't think I shall like it at all," said Carrots, "for there won't be any sea there either I can't think *how* it can be a nice place."

"But Carrots, dear," said Floss in some distress, "you musn't think of heaven that way. It isn't like that. Heaven isn't like a place exactly, mamma says. It is just being *quite* good."

"Being *quite* good," repeated Carrots thoughtfully. "I wish I could be quite good, Floss, wish everybody could, don't you?"

"Yes," said Floss. "But really you must get up, Carrots dear; that will be good for just now. Being good always comes in little bits like that."

"But in heaven, the being good will be all in one great big piece, that's how it will be, isn't it?" said Carrots, as he got out of bed and began hunting for his slippers.

I cannot tell you half the history of that first day at Greenmays, or of many others that followed. They were very happy days, and they were full of so many new pleasures and interests for Carrots and Floss that I should really have to write another book to tell you all about them. Everybody was kind to the children, and everything that could be thought of to make them feel "at home" was done. And Greenmays was such a pretty place—Carrots could hardly miss his dear old sea, once he had learnt to make friends with the hills. At first he could do nothing but gaze at them in astonishment.

"I didn't think hills were so big, or that they

would have so many faces," he said to Floss and Sybil the first morning when they were out in the garden together.

Sybil burst out laughing. "Oh you funny Carrots!" she said; "you're just like a boy in a fairy story—you've got such queer fancies."

"But they're *not* fancies, Sybil," said Carrots, gravely, turning his great brown eyes on his cousin. "The hills *have* got lots of different faces: that one up there, the one with the round knobby top, has looked *quite* different several times this morning. First it looked smiley and smooth, and then it got all cross and wrinkly, and *now* it looks as if it was going to sleep."

Sybil stared up at the hill he was pointing to. "I see what you mean," she said; "but it's only the shadows of the clouds."

"That's pretty," said Carrots: "who told you that, Sybil? I never thought of clouds having shadows."

"Nobody told me," said Sybil; "I finded it out my own self. I find out lots of things," she continued, importantly. "I dare say it's because of my name—papa says my name means I *should* find out things, like a sort of a fairy, you know."

"Does it?" said Carrots, in a rather awe-struck tone. "I should like that. When you were little, Sybil," he continued, "were you ever frightened of shadows? *I* was."

"No," said Sybil, "I only thought they were funny. And once papa told me a story of a shadow that ran away from its master. It went across the street, at night, you know, when the lamps were lighted: there were houses opposite, you see, and the shadow went into such a beautiful house, and wouldn't come back again!"

"And what after that?" said both Floss and Carrots in a breath.

"Oh, I can't tell it you all," said Sybil; "you must ask papa."

"Does he often tell you stories?" asked Floss.

"Bits," said Sybil; "he doesn't tell them all through, like mother. But he's very nice about answering things I ask him. He doesn't say 'you couldn't understand,' or 'you'll know when you're older,' that *horrid* way."

"He must be nice," said Floss, who had secretly been trembling a little at the thought of the strange uncle.

And he did turn out *very* nice. He was older than Floss had expected; a good deal older than auntie, whom he sometimes spoke to as if she were quite a little girl, in a way which amused the children very much. At first he seemed very quiet and grave, but after a while Floss found out that in his own way he was very fond of fun, and she confided to auntie that she thought he was the funniest person she had ever seen. I don't know if auntie told him this, or if he took it as a compliment, but certainly he could not have been offended, for every

day, as they learnt to know him better, the children found him kinder and kinder.

So they were very happy at Greenmays, and no doubt would have gone on being so but for one thing. There came bad news of their mother.

This was how they heard it. Every week at least, for several weeks, Floss or Carrots, and sometimes both, got a letter from their mother or from Cecil and Louise; and at first these letters were so cheerful, that even the little bit of anxiety which the children had hardly known was in their hearts melted away.

"What a *good* thing mamma went to that nice warm place, isn't it, auntie?" Carrots used to say after the arrival of each letter, and auntie most heartily agreed with the happy little fellow. But at last, just about Christmas-time, when the thin foreign-looking letter, that the children had learnt to know so well, made its appearance one morning on the breakfast-table, it proved to be for auntie—

that, of course, they did not object to, had there been one for them too, but there was not!

"Auntie dear, there is no letter for us," said Floss, when auntie came into the room. "Will you please open yours quick, and see if there is one inside it?"

"I don't think there is," said auntie; "it doesn't feel like it."

However, she opened the letter at once. No, there was no enclosure; and Floss, who was watching her face, saw that it grew troubled as she ran her eyes down the page.

"My letter is from your father. I cannot read it properly till after breakfast, for uncle is waiting for me to pour out his coffee. Run off now, dears, and I'll come to the nursery and tell you all about it after breakfast," she said, trying to look and speak just the same as usual.

But Floss saw that she was *trying;* she did not persist, however, but took Carrots by the hand, and

went off obediently without speaking, only giving auntie one wistful look as she turned away.

"What's wrong, Florence?" said Sybil's father, as the door closed after the children.

"It is about Lucy," said auntie; "she is much worse; *very* ill indeed. She has caught cold somehow, and Frank seems almost to have lost hope already."

Two or three tears rolled down auntie's face as she spoke. For a minute or two Sybil's father said nothing.

"How about telling the children?" he asked at last.

"That's just it," replied auntie. "Frank leaves it to me to tell them or not, as I think best. He would not let Cecil or Louise write, as he thought if it had to be told I had better do so as gently as I could, by word of mouth. But they *must* be told—they are such quick children, I believe Floss suspects it already. And if—and if the next news

should be *worse*," continued auntie with a little sob, "I would never forgive myself for not having prepared them, and they would be full of self-reproach for having been happy and merry as usual. Floss would say she should have known it by instinct."

"Would they feel it so much?—could they realise it? They are so young," said Sybil's father.

Auntie shook her head. "Not too young to feel it terribly," she said. "It is much better to tell them. I could not hide the sorrow in my face from those two honest pairs of eyes, for one thing."

"Well, you know best," said her husband.

A sad telling it was, and the way in which the children took it touched auntie's loving heart to the quick. They were so quiet and "pitiful," as little Sybil said. Floss's face grew white, for, with a child's hasty rush at conclusions, she fancied at first that auntie was paving the way for the worst news of all.

"Is mamma *dead?*" she whispered, and auntie's

"Oh no, no, darling. Not so bad as that," seemed to give her a sort of crumb of hope, even before she had heard all.

And Carrots stood beside auntie's knee, clasping his little mother Floss's hand tight, and looking up in auntie's face with those wonderful eyes of his, which auntie had said truly one *could* not deceive; and when he had been told all there was to tell, he just said softly, "Oh *poor* mamma! Auntie, she kissened us so *many* times!"

And then, which auntie was on the whole glad of, the three children sat down on the rug together and cried; Sybil, in her sympathy, as heartily as the others, while she kept kissing and petting them, and calling them by every endearing name she could think of.

"When will there be another letter, auntie?" said Floss.

"The day after to-morrow," said auntie. "Your father will write by every mail.'

In her own heart auntie had not much hope. From what Captain Desart said, the anxiety was not likely to last long. The illness had taken a different form from Mrs. Desart's other attacks. "She must be better or worse in a day or two," he wrote, and auntie's heart sorely misgave her as to which it would be.

The sorrowful day seemed very long to the children. They did their lessons as usual, for auntie told them it would be much better to do so.

"Would it please mamma?" said Carrots; and when auntie said "Yes, she was quite sure it would," he got his books at once, and "tried" even harder than usual.

But after lessons they had no heart to play, and there was no "must" about that. By bed-time they all looked worn out with crying and the sort of strange excitement there is about great sorrows—above all to children—which is more exhausting than almost anything.

"This will never do," thought auntie. "Hugh" (that was the name of Sybil's father) "will have reason to think I should have taken his advice, and not told them, if they go on like this."

"Sybil," she said, "Floss and Carrots will make themselves ill before the next letter comes. What can we do for them?"

Sybil shook her head despondently.

"I don't know, mother dear," she said; "I've got out all my best things to please them, but it's no good." She stood still for a minute, then her face lightened up. "Mother," she said, "'aposing you were to read aloud some of those stories you're going to get bounded up into a book some day? They would like *that*."

Floss hardly felt as if she could care to hear *any* stories, however pretty. But she did not like to disappoint kind auntie by saying so, especially when auntie told her she really wanted to know if she and Carrots liked her stories, as it would

help her to judge if other children would care for them when they were "bounded up into a book."

So the next day auntie read them some, and they talked them over and got quite interested in them. Fortunately, she did not read them all that day, for the next day there was still more need of something to distract the children's sorrowful thoughts, as the looked-for letter did not come. Auntie would have liked to cheer the children by reminding them of the old sayings that "No news is good news," and "It is ill news which flies fast," but she dared not, for her own heart was very heavy with anxiety. And she was very glad to see them interested in the rest of the stories for the time.

I cannot tell you these stories, but some day perhaps you may come across the little book which they were made into. But there is one of them which I should like to tell you, as it is

not very long, and in the children's mind it was always associated with something that happened just as auntie had finished reading it. For it was the last of her little stories, and it was called——

CHAPTER XII.

"THE TWO FUNNY LITTLE TROTS."

"Like to a double cherry."

Midsummer-Night's Dream.

'"Oh mamma," cried I, from the window by which I was standing, to my mother who was working by the fire, "*do* come here and look at these two funny little trots."'

[Auntie had only read this first sentence of her story when Sybil interrupted her.

"Mother dear," she said, in her prim little way, "before you begin, do tell us one thing. Does the story end sadly?"

Auntie smiled. "You should have asked me before I *had* begun, Sybil," she said. "But never mind now. I don't really think I can tell you if

it ends sadly or not. It would be like telling you the end at the beginning, and it would spoil the interest, if you understand what that means."

"Very well," said Sybil, resignedly, "then I suppose I must wait. But I *won't* like it if it ends badly, mother, and Floss won't, and Carrots won't. Will you, Floss and Carrots?"

"I don't think Floss and Carrots can say, till they've heard it," said auntie. "Now, Sybil, you mustn't interrupt any more. Where was I? Oh yes"]—'"*do* come and look at these two funny little trots."

'My mother got up from her seat and came to the window. She could not help smiling when she saw the little couple I pointed out to her.

'"Aren't they a pair of fat darlings?" I said. "I wonder if they live in our terrace?"

'We knew very little of our neighbours, though we were not living in London, for we had only

just come to St. Austin's. We had come there to spend the winter, as it was a mild and sheltered place, for I, then a girl of sixteen, had been in delicate health for some time.' ["You wouldn't believe it to see me now, would you?" said auntie, looking up at the children with a smile on her pretty young-looking face, but it was quite true, all the same.] 'I was my mother's only girl,' she went on, turning to her manuscript again, 'and she was a widow, so you can fancy what a pet I was. My big brothers were already all out in the world, in the navy, or the army, or at college, and my mother and I generally lived by ourselves in a country village much farther north than St. Austin's, and it was quite an event to us to leave our own home for several months and settle ourselves down in lodgings in a strange place.

'It seemed a very strange place to us, for we had not a single friend or acquaintance in it, and

at home in our village we knew everybody, and everybody knew us, from the clergyman down to farmer Grinthwait's sheep-dog, and nothing happened without our knowing it. I suppose I was naturally of rather a sociable turn. I knew my mother used sometimes in fun to call me "a little gossip," and I really very much missed the sight of the accustomed friendly faces. We had been two days at St. Austin's, and I had spent most of those two days at the window, declaring to my mother, that I should not feel so "strange" if I got to know some of our neighbours by sight, if nothing more.

'But hitherto I had hardly succeeded even in this. There did not seem to be any "neighbours" in the passers-by; they were just passers by who never seemed to pass by again, and without anything particular to distinguish them if they did. For St. Austin's was a busy little place, and our house was on the South Esplanade, the favourite

"promenade" for the visitors, none of whom, gentlemen, ladies, or children had particularly attracted me till the morning I first caught sight of my funny little trots.

'I do think they would have attracted any one—any one certainly that loved children. I fancy I see them now, the two dears, coming slowly and solemnly along, each with a hand of their nurse, pulling *well* back from her, as if the effort to keep up, even with her deliberate rate of walking, was almost too much for their fat little legs. They looked exactly the same size, and were alike in everything, from their dresses—which this first day were brown holland, very easy about the bodies, very short and bunchy about the skirts—to the two white woolly lambs, clasped manfully by each in his or her disengaged hand. Whether they were boys or girls I could not tell in the least, and to this day I do not know.

'"*Aren't* they darlings mamma?" I said.

'"They certainly are two funny little trots," she replied with a smile, using my own expression.

'Mamma went back to her knitting, but I stayed by the window, watching my new friends. They passed slowly up the Esplanade, my eyes following them till they were out of sight, and then I turned away regretfully.

'"They are sure not to pass again," I said, "and they are so nice."

'"If they live near here, very likely the Esplanade is their daily walk, and they will be passing back again in a few minutes," said my mother, entering into my fancy.

'I took up her suggestion eagerly. She was right: in about a quarter of an hour my trots appeared again, this time from the other direction, and, as good luck would have it, just opposite our window, their nurse happening to meet an acquaintance, they came to a halt!

'"Mamma, mamma," I exclaimed, "here they are again!"

'Mamma nodded her head and smiled without looking up. She was just then counting the rows of her knitting, and was afraid of losing the number. I pressed my face close to the window—if only the trots would look my way!—I could hardly resist tapping on the pane.

'Suddenly a bright thought struck me. I seized Gip, my little dog, who was asleep on the hearth-rug and held him up to the window.

'"T'ss, Gip; T'ss, cat. At her; at her," I exclaimed.

'Poor Gip had doubtless been having delightful dreams—it was very hard on him to be wakened up so startlingly. He blinked his eyes and tried to see the imaginary cat—no doubt he thought it was his own fault he did not succeed, for he was the most humble-minded and unpresuming of little dogs, and his faith in me was unbounded.

"Suddenly a bright thought struck me, I seized Gip, my little dog, who was asleep on the hearthrug, and held him up at the window."

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He could not see a cat, but he took it for granted that *I* did; so he set to work barking vigorously. That was just what I wanted. The trots heard the noise and both turned round; then they let go their nurse's hands and made a little journey round her skirts till they met.

'"Dot," said one, "pretty doggie."

'"Doll," said the other, both speaking at once, you understand, "pretty doggie."

'I don't mean to say that I *heard* what they said, I only *saw* it. But afterwards, when I had heard their voices, I felt sure that was what they had said, for they almost always spoke together.

'Then they joined their disengaged hands (the outside hand of each still clasping its woolly lamb), and there they stood, legs well apart, little mouths and eyes wide open, staring with the greatest interest and solemnity at Gip and me. At Gip, of course, far more than at me. Gip was a dog, *I*, was only a girl!—quite a middle-

aged person, no doubt, the trots thought me, if they thought about me at all; perhaps they did a little, as I was Gip's owner; for I was sixteen, and they could not have been much more than three.

'But all this time they were so solemn. I wanted to make them laugh. There was a little table in the window—a bow window, *of course*, as it was at the sea-side, and certain to catch winds from every quarter of the heavens—upon which I mounted Gip, and set to work putting him through his tricks. I made him perform "ready, present, *fire*," with a leap to catch the bit of biscuit on his nose. I made him "beg," "lie dead," like Mother Hubbard's immortal pet, and do everything a well-educated dog could be expected to do. And, oh, how funny it was to watch the trots! Evidently they had never seen anything of the kind before; they stared at first as if they could hardly believe their eyes, and then they smiled, and, *at last*, they laughed. How prettily they

laughed—they looked more like two fat cherubs than ever.

'But their laughing attracted their maid's attention. She too turned round, and I was pleased to see that she had a pleasant pretty young face. "I shouldn't have liked those dear trots to have a cross old nurse," I said to myself, and the maid still further raised herself in my good opinion by laughing and smiling too. In a minute or two when she thought "that was enough for to-day," she stooped and whispered to the trots. They immediately lifted their little hands, the right of one, the left of the other—for *nothing*, you see, could have persuaded them to let go of their precious lambs—to their rosy mouths and blew a kiss to me, and I could *see* them say, "Zank zou, lady; zank zou, doggie."

'You may be sure I kissed my hand to them in return, and off they toddled, each with a hand of "Bessie," as I afterwards heard them call their

maid, and hauling back manfully as before, which gave Bessie the look of a very large steam-tug convoying two very little vessels.

'I watched them till they were quite out of sight. Then I turned to my mother.

'"I have made two friends here any way, mamma," I said. "The trots are sure to stop every time they pass. It will be something to watch for."

'Mamma smiled. She was pleased to see *me* pleased and interested, for she had been beginning to fear that the dulness and strangeness of our new life would prevent St. Austin's doing me as much good as she had hoped.

'"To-morrow, dear," she said, "if it is fine, I hope you will be able to go a little walk, and we'll look out for your little friends."

'It was fine the next day, and we did go out, and we did meet the trots!

'They caught sight of me (of Gip, rather, I

should perhaps say) and I of them, just about the same moment. I saw them tug their nurse, and when they got close up to me they stopped short. It was no use Bessie's trying to get them on; there they stood resolutely, till the poor girl's face grew red, and she looked quite ashamed. Gip, who I must say, had a wonderful amount of tact, ran up to them with a friendly little bark. Bessie let go the trots' hands and stooped to stroke him.

'"He won't bite, miss, will he?" she said gently, looking up at me.

'"Oh, dear, no," I said, and the trots, smiling with delight, stooped—not that they had so very far to stoop—to stroke him too.

'"Pretty doggie," said Doll.

'"Pretty doggie," said Dot.

'Then they held up their dear little mouths to kiss me. "Zank zou, lady," they said, and each taking a hand of Bessie again, they proceeded on their way.

'After that day, not many passed without my seeing them, and talking to them, and making Gip show off his tricks. Sometimes our meetings were at the window, sometimes on the road; once or twice, when there came some unusually fine mild days, mamma let me sit out on the shore, and I taught the trots to dig a hole for Gip and bury him in the sand, all but his bright eyes and funny black nose—that *was* a beautiful game! I never found out exactly where my friends lived; it was in one of the side streets leading on to the Esplanade, that was all I knew. I never knew, as I said, if they were boys or girls, or perhaps one of each. Mamma wanted one day to ask Bessie, but I wouldn't let her. They were just my two little trots, that was all I wanted to know.

'"It would spoil them to fancy them growing up into great boys or girls," I said. "I want them to be always trots—nothing else."

'And as Bessie called them simply Doll and

Dot, without any "master" or "miss," I was able to keep my fancy.

'When the weather grew colder, the trots came out in a new costume—sealskin coats, sealskin caps, and sealskin gloves—they were just little balls of sealskin, and looked "trottier" than ever. About this time they left off carrying their woolly lambs I suspect the real reason was that their extreme affection for the lambs had resulted in these favoured animals growing more black than white, and that Bessie judged them unfit for appearing in public, but if this *was* the case, evidently Bessie had been obliged to resort to artifice to obtain their owners' consent to the lambs being left at home. For, when I asked the trots where the precious creatures were, they looked melan choly and distressed and shook their heads.

'"Too told!" said Doll, and Dot repeated, like a mournful echo, "too told!"

'"Of course," said I, "how stupid of me not to

think of it! of course it's far too cold for such very little lambs to be out."

'Bessie looked gratefully at me. "We're going to buy some cakes for tea," she said. with a smile, and sure enough in about half-an-hour the trio reappeared again, and came to a standstill as usual, opposite our window. And, instead of a lamb, each trot hugged a little parcel, neatly done up in white paper. I opened the window to hear what they were saying, they looked so excited.

'"Takes for tea," they both called out at once, "takes for tea. Lady have one. Dip have one."

'And poor Bessie was obliged to open the parcels, and extract one "take" from each and hand them up to me, before my little dears would be satisfied.

'Can you fancy that I really got to love the trots? I did not want to know who they were, or what sort of a father and mother they had—they

were well taken care of, that was evident, for somehow, knowing anything more about them would have spoilt them for being my funny little trots.

'But, for several weeks of the three months we spent at St. Austin's, the sight of these happy little creatures was one of my greatest pleasures, and a day without a glimpse of them would have seemed blank and dull.

'There came a time, however, when for many days I did not see my little friends. The weather was bad just then, and mamma said she was sure they had got colds, that would be all that was wrong with them, but somehow I felt uneasy. I asked our doctor, when he called, if there was much illness about, and he, fancying I was nervous on my own account, replied, "Oh no, with the exception of two or three cases of croup, he had no serious ailments among his patients: it was a very healthy season."

'I got frightened at the idea of croup, and cross-

questioned him to discover if my trots were among the sufferers, but he shook his head. All his little patients were mere infants; he did not even know the trots by sight.

'Then mamma suggested another very reasonable explanation of their disappearance.

'"They have probably left St. Austin's," she said. "Many people come here for only the *very* worst of the winter, and that is about over now."

'But even this did not satisfy me. I was certain something was wrong with Doll and Dot, and I wasted, I should be ashamed to say how many hours gazing out of the window in hopes of catching sight of the familiar little figures.

'At last, one day, when I had almost left off hoping ever to see them again, suddenly, *two* figures appeared on the Esplanade, a stone's throw from our window.

'Who were they? Could it be—yes, it must be *one* of the trots, led by, not Bessie, no, this maid

was a stranger. Where could Bessie be? And oh, *where* was my other little trot? For, even at some yards' distance, I saw something sadly different in the appearance of the one little figure, slowly coming along in our direction. It was dressed—hat, coat, gloves, socks and all—it was dressed in deep mourning.

'I seized my hat and rushed out to meet them. Mamma thought I was going out of my mind I believe. When I found myself in the open air, I tried to control myself and look like the rest of the people walking quietly along, though my heart was beating violently, and I felt as if I could not speak without crying. But when I got up to the one little trot and its attendant, the sight of her strange face composed me. She was so different from Bessie—old and stiff and prim looking. I stooped to kiss the child, Dot or Doll, I knew not which. "How are you, darling?" I said, "And where is ——" I stopped short.

'The trot looked up in my face.

'"Oh lady," it said, "Dot is all alone. Doll is 'done to 'Ebben," and the great tears gathered in Dot's mournful eyes and rolled down Dot's rosy cheeks.

'"Hush, hush, my dear. You mustn't cry. You'll make yourself ill if you cry any more," said the hard looking nurse.

'A moment before, I had intended turning to her and asking for some particulars of the baby's sad words, but now I felt I *could* not. She was so stiff and unsympathising. I could not bear her to see me, a stranger, crying about what I had heard Besides, what good would it do? Why should I hear any more? I shrank from doing so. The bare fact was enough. I just bent down and kissed the solitary darling.

'"Good-bye, my trot," I said. I could not say another word.

'"Dood bye, don't ky," said Dot, stroking my

cheek. "Doll won't tum back, but Dot will do to 'Ebben too some day."

'That was quite too much for me. I turned away and hurried back home as fast as I could.

'"Mamma," I exclaimed, rushing into our sitting-room, and throwing myself down on the sofa, "It's just what I thought. I wish you would come away from St. Austin's at once. I shall never, never like it again."

'"What *is* the matter, Florence?" said poor mamma, quite startled.

'"It's about the trots," I said, now fairly sobbing, "I have just seen one—in deep mourning, mamma, —and—and—the other one is *dead*."

'"Poor little angel!" said mamma. And the tears came into her eyes too.

'I did not see Dot again after that day. I fancy that was its last walk before leaving St. Austin's for its regular home, wherever that was. And a very short time after, we ourselves left too.

* * * * *

'I never forgot the trots. Of course the pleasure of going back to our own dear home again, and seeing all our old friends, raised my spirits, and softened the real grief I had felt. But whenever we spoke of St. Austin's, or people asked me about it, and mentioned the esplanade or the shore, or any of the places where I had seen the trots, the tears *would* come into my eyes, as again I seemed to see before me the two dear funny little figures. And whenever our plans for the following winter were alluded to, I always said one thing: "Wherever you go, mamma, don't go to St. Austin's."

'My mother gave in to me. When did she not? How patient she was with me, how sympathising, even in my fancies! And how unselfish—it was not till long after we had left St. Austin's, that she told me what anxiety she had gone through on hearing of my having kissed little Dot. For how sadly probable it seemed that Doll had died of some infectious illness, such as scarlet-fever, for instance, which I had never had!

'"But *Dot* couldn't have been ill, mamma," I said. "Dot looked perfectly well."

'"Did he?" said my mother. Sometimes she called the trots "he" and sometimes "she," in the funniest way! "I wonder what the other little dear died of?"

'"So do I," I replied. "Still, on the whole, I think I am just as well pleased not to know."

'Our uncertainty for the next winter ended in what was to me a delightful decision. We determined to go to the South of France. I could amuse you children by a description of our journey—journeys in those days really were much more amusing than now; but I must hasten on to the end of my story. We had fixed upon Pau as our head-quarters, and we arrived there early in November. What a different thing from our November at home! I could hardly believe it *was* November; it would have seemed to me far less wonderful to have been told I had been asleep for six months, and that

really it was May, and not November at all, than to have awakened as I did, that first morning after our arrival, and to have seen out of the window the lovely sunshine and bright blue sky, and summer-look of warmth, and comfort, and radiance!

'We had gone to an hotel for a few days, intending to look out for a little house, or "apartement" (which, children, does not mean the same thing as our English lodgings by any means), at our leisure. Your grandmother was not rich, and the coming so far cost a great deal. The hotel we had been recommended to, was a very comfortable one, though not one of the most fashionable, and the landlord was very civil, as some friend who had stayed with him the year before had written about our coming. He showed us our rooms himself, and hoped we should like them, and then he turned back to say he trusted we should not be disturbed by the voices of some children in the next "salon." He would not have risked it, he said, had he been able to help

it, but there were no other rooms vacant, and the family with the children were leaving the next day. Not that they were noisy children by any means; they were very *chers petits*, but there *were* ladies, to whom the very name of children in their vicinity was—— here the landlord held up his hands and made a grimace!

'"Then they must be old maids!" I said, laughing, "which mamma and I are not. We love children," at which Mr. Landlord bowed and smiled, and said something complimentary about mademoiselle being so "aimable."

'I listened for the children's voices that evening, and once or twice I heard their clear merry tones. But as for any "disturbance," one might as well have complained of a cuckoo in the distance, as of anything we heard of our little neighbours. We did not see them; only once, as I was running along the passage, I caught a glimpse at the other end of a little pinafored figure led by a nurse, disappearing

through a doorway. I did not see its face; in fact the glimpse was of the hastiest. Yet *something* about the wee figure, a certain round-about bunchiness, and a sort of pulling back from the maid, as she went into the room, recalled vaguely to my heart, rather than to my mind, two little toddling creatures, that far away across the sea I had learnt to love and look for. When I went into our room, there were tears in my eyes, and when mamma asked me the reason, I told her that I had seen a child that somehow had reminded me of my two little trots.

'"Poor little trots," said mamma. "I wonder if the one that was left still misses the other?"

'But that was all we said about them.

'The next morning I was in a fever to go out and see all that was to be seen. I dragged poor mamma into all the churches, and half the shops, and would have had her all through the castle too, but that she declared she could do no more. So we came to

a halt at the great "Place," and sat down on a nice shady seat to watch the people. I, consoling myself with the reflection, that as we were to be four months at Pau, there was still a *little* time left for sight-seeing.

'It was very amusing. There were people of all nations—*children* of all nations, little French boys and girls, prettily but simply dressed, some chatting merrily, some walking primly beside their white capped bonnes; little Russians, looking rather grand, but not *so* grand as their nurses in their rich costumes of bright scarlet and blue, embroidered in gold; some very pert, shrill-voiced Americans, and a few unmistakable English. We amused ourselves by guessing the nationality of all these little people.

'"*Those* are Italians or Spaniards, mamma, look what dark eyes they have, and *those* are——" I suddenly stopped. "Oh, mamma!" I exclaimed, and when she looked at me, she saw I had grown

quite pale, and in another moment, seeing to what I was pointing, she understood the reason. There, right before us, coming slowly up the middle of the Place, Bessie in the middle, each child with a hand of hers tugging back manfully in the old way, each, yes, *really*, each under the other arm hugging a woolly lamb, came the two funny little trots!

'I felt at first as if I were dreaming. *Could* it be the trots? I sat still in a half stupid way, staring, but Gip—I was forgetting to tell you that *of course* Gip had come with us to Pau—Gip had far more presence of mind than I. He did not stop to wonder *how* it could be the trots, he was simply satisfied that it *was* the trots, and forwards he darted, leaping, barking furiously, wagging his tail, giving every sort of welcome in dog language, that he could think of.

'"Dip, Dip; see Bessie, here is a doggie like Dip," said one trot.

'"Dip, Dip, pretty Dip," said the other.

'The sound of their voices seemed to bring back my common sense. They *were* my own dear trots. "Dip, Dip" would have satisfied me, even if I had not seen them. The trots never *could* manage the letter "G!" I flew forwards, and kneeling down on the ground, little caring how I soiled my nice new dress, or what the people on the Place thought of me, I regularly hugged my two pets.

'"Here is Dip's kind lady too," they both said at once, smiling and happy, but not by any means particularly surprised to see me. I looked up at Bessie at last, and held out my hand. She shook it heartily.

'"I *am* pleased to see you again, miss, to be sure; who would have thought it?" she said. "And they haven't forgot you, haven't Doll and Dot. They are always speaking of Gip and you, miss."

'"But, Bessie," I began, and then I hesitated. How could I tell her what I had thought? "How was it you left St. Austin's so suddenly?"—the

trots were not in mourning now, they were prettily dressed in dark blue sailor serge, as bunchy as ever.

'Bessie thought for a minute.

'"Let me see," she said, "oh yes, I remember! We did leave suddenly. My mistress's father died, and she was sent for off to Edinburgh, and she took Doll and me, and left Dot to keep her papa company. Master said he'd be lost without one of them, and he couldn't get off to Edinburgh for a fortnight after us. But we'll never try *that* again, miss. Dot did nothing but cry for Doll, and Doll for Dot. Dot, so Martha the housemaid said, was always saying, 'Doll's done to 'Ebben,' till it was pitiful to hear, and Dot was just as bad in Edinburgh about Doll."

'"But Dot *did* 'do to 'Ebben," said Doll, who as well as Dot was listening to what Bessie was saying. "And then Doll 'tummed to 'Ebben too," said Dot, "and then 'Ebben was nice."

'I kissed the pets again, partly to prevent Bessie seeing the tears in my eyes. I understood it all now, without asking any more, and Bessie never knew what it was I *had* thought.

'Only you can fancy how sorry I was to find the trots were leaving Pau that very afternoon! They were the children whose dear little voices I had heard through the wall, who the landlord had feared might disturb us! They were going on to Italy for the winter.

'"If only I had known last night who they were," I said to mamma regretfully.

'Mamma, however, was always wise. "Think rather," she said, "how very glad you should be to know it this morning. And who can tell but what some time or other you may see the trots again."

'But I never did!

CHAPTER XIII.

GOOD ENDINGS.

But I lost my happy childhood,
* * * * *
It slipped from me you shall know,
It was in the dewy alleys
Of the land of long ago.
* * * * *
Not in sadness,
Nor reproach, these words I say,
God is good, and gives new gladness,
When the old He takes away.

"You never did? oh what a pity!" exclaimed Sybil. "You really never, never did, mother?"

Auntie looked rather "funny," as the children call it.

"As *trots* I never saw them again," she said, "and at the time I wrote out that story I had not seen them again at all."

"But you've seen them since," cried all the three children at once, "you've seen them since they've grown big. Oh auntie, oh mother, do tell us."

"I couldn't just now, truly I couldn't," said auntie, "it would lead me into another story which isn't written yet. All that I know about 'the two funny little trots' I have told you. Do you like it?"

"Awfully," said Sybil.

"*Very* much," said Floss.

"It's lovely," said Carrots.

Auntie smiled at the children. They looked so pleased and interested, it was evident that for the time they had forgotten their sorrow and anxiety. Suddenly, just as she was thinking sadly how soon it must return to their minds, there came a loud ring at the bell. They all started, they had been sitting so quietly.

"It must be the post," said Sybil. Auntie had

thought so too, but had not said it, as it was very unlikely this post would bring any letter from Captain Desart.

It did however! Fletcher appeared with one in another minute; the thin large envelope, and the black, rather scrawly writing that Floss and Carrots knew so well. It would have been no use trying to conceal it from them, so auntie opened it quietly, though her fingers trembled as she did so. She read it very quickly, it was not a long letter, and then she looked up with the tears in her eyes. "Children, dear children," she said, "it *is* good news. Your dear mother is a little better, and they have good hopes of her."

Oh how glad they were! They kissed auntie and Sybil and each other, and it seemed as if a great heavy stone had been lifted off their hearts. There was still of course reason for *anxiety*, but there was hope, "good hope," wrote Captain Desart, and what does not that mean? Auntie felt so

hopeful herself that she could not find it in her heart to check the children for being so.

"It is because you made the story of the trots end nicely that that nice letter came," said Sybil, and nothing that her mother could say would persuade her that *she* had nothing to do with the ending, that she had just told it as it really happened!

I am telling you the story of Floss and Carrots as it really happened too, and I am so glad that it—the story of this part of their young lives, that is to say—ends happily too. Their mother did get better, wonderfully better, and was able to come back to England in the spring, looking stronger than for many years. To England, but not to Sandyshore. Captain Desart got another appointment much farther south, where the climate was milder and better and the winters not to be dreaded for a delicate person. So they all left the Cove House!

Their new home was of course by the sea too, but Carrots never would allow that it was the same sea. His own old sea stayed behind at Sandy-shore, though if he were to go to look for it there now I doubt if he would find it. When old friends once get away into the country of long ago, they are hard to find again—we learn to doubt if they are to be found anywhere except in their own corners of our memory.

And it is long ago now since the days when Carrots and his dear Floss ran races on the sands and made "plans" together. Long ago, in so far that you would not be able *anywhere* to find these children whom I loved so much, and whom I have told you a little about. You would, at least I *hope* you would, like to know what became of them, how they grew up, and what Carrots did when he got to be a man. But this I cannot now tell you, for my little book is long enough—I only hope you are not tired of it—only I may tell